

VIENNA (AFP) — General Wesley Clark, NATO Supreme Allied Commander-Europe, said Friday that "preparations are continuing for potential military action against Iraq if no diplomatic solution is found to the crisis," adding that "the U.S. has stated its preference for a diplomatic solution," he told a meeting of Austrian military officials in Vienna. But if Iraqi President Saddam Hussein "refuses to comply, there is an option, and preparations for that option are clearly underway." Gen. Clark said it was clear that the Iraqi regime was still trying to deceive the West over its weapons of mass destruction. "I think the evidence is quite clear that these weapons of mass destruction remain to some degree in place," he added. "Essentially, Saddam Hussein must comply with the U.N. Security Council resolutions."

King discusses Gulf crisis with Assad, Mubarak, Demirel

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Hussein on Friday exchanged views with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Syrian President Hafez Assad on the Iraqi-U.N. crisis. King Hussein also received a phone call from Turkish President Suleiman Demirel with whom he discussed the latest developments in the region, and the need for implementing all Security Council resolutions in order to prevent any further escalation which might lead to catastrophes, not to Iraq alone, but to the whole region.

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Iraq hopeful for a peaceful solution as Russia steps up pressure on U.S.

Annan: I am still preparing things. I've said time and time again, it's not excluded that I do take a trip to Baghdad

Combined agency dispatches

Iraq said Friday there is still a chance that it can reach a diplomatic settlement with the United Nations over U.N. arms inspections and expressed hope that the United States would not attack.

Iraqi Information and Culture Minister Humam Abdul Ghafur said: "We are working for a diplomatic solution to this crisis which was created by the Americans."

"We believe that there are still chances open for such a solution. And Iraq is cooperating with all parties with the object of reaching a diplomatic solution for this issue," he said.

As for a U.S. attack, he said: "We hope that this will not happen."

"But if that did happen, they will find a unified people confronting them, defending their right, and the Arabs will find our people a source of pride for them," Mr. Abdul Ghafur added.

"Contacts are continuing and Deputy Premier Tareq Aziz contacted the U.N. secretary general many times."

"And there is exchange of views, and as you know there is a French initiative, and there is the visit by the Arab League secretary general."

France, forging its own way in the Iraqi crisis, said on Friday United Nations chief Kofi Annan should be given a free hand to negotiate a peaceful solution with Baghdad.

French Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Anne Gazeau-Secret said did not say from whom the hand should be free, but it was clear she was referring to the United States.

"We must give full confidence to the secretary-general to seek a solution that would fully respect United Nations resolutions... and we hope he can go to Baghdad as soon as possible," Ms. Gazeau-Secret told a press briefing.

"We believe he must dispose of sufficient autonomy for his mission to be fruitful," she added.

Mr. Annan repeated Friday he was not excluding a mission to Baghdad after Russia stepped up pressure for such a trip to defuse the standoff over U.N. arms inspections.

Mr. Annan told reporters

here who asked about prospects for a Baghdad mission: "I haven't fixed a date yet, but I'm still preparing things. As I've said time and time again, it's not excluded that I do take a trip to Baghdad."

He added that at a meeting with ambassadors of the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council later Friday, he would discuss "what steps, what arrangements, what proposals we can get as a diplomatic solution, but not specifically a timetable for a trip to Baghdad."

Russia on Friday stepped up pressure on the United States to hold back from a military strike against Iraq, again urging further diplomatic efforts to end the crisis over U.N. weapons inspections.

Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov told reporters the search for a diplomatic solution should not end before Mr. Annan had visited Baghdad.

Speaking after meeting U.S. Defence Secretary William Cohen, Mr. Primakov said the time was right for such a trip. "Russia believes one cannot

talk about failed diplomatic efforts or reach a verdict before Kofi Annan goes to Baghdad himself," he said.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin caused a stir on Monday during a trip to Italy when he said Mr. Annan planned a trip to Baghdad but the United Nations denied such a visit was being organised.

Mr. Primakov said Mr. Annan, if he went, would be able to "see for himself on the spot and undertake an attempt to reach an agreement and bring the issue to a political settlement."

Moscow has been pushing hard to stave off a U.S. military strike if Baghdad fails to open sites to U.N. arms inspectors charged with eliminating Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. Mr. Yeltsin has a special envoy in the Iraqi capital.

U.S.-Russian tensions that had been slowly building for weeks behind the scenes spilled into the open when Russian Defence Minister Igor Sergeev on Thursday rebuked Mr. Cohen for taking a "tough and uncompromising" stand against Iraq. Despite Mr. Sergeev's

warning that future U.S.-Russian relations were in jeopardy, Mr. Cohen and other U.S. officials vowed to build support for a bombardment of Iraq if no diplomatic breakthrough is achieved soon.

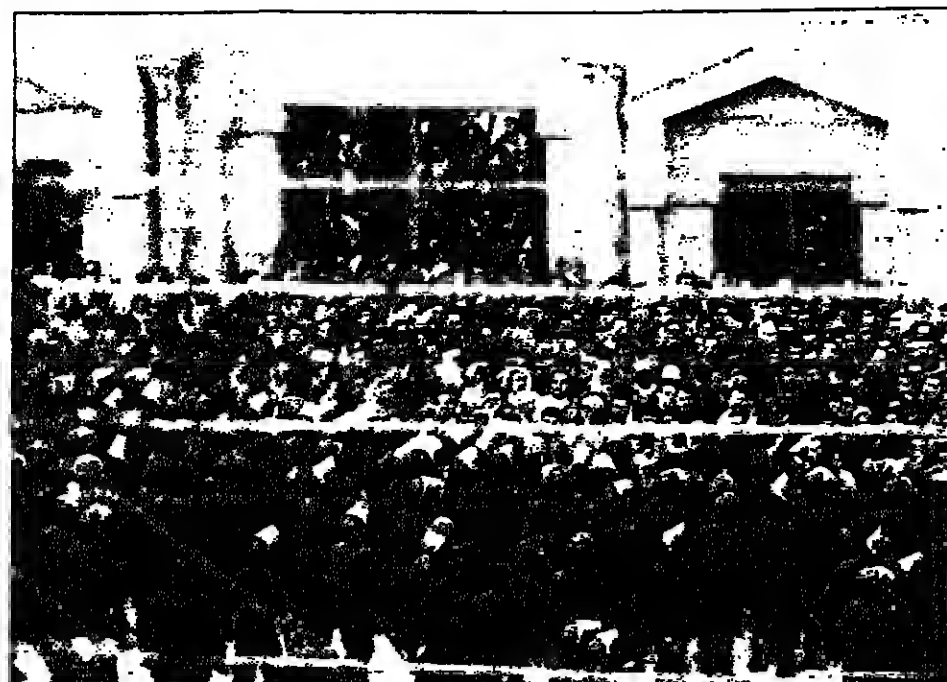
Argentina has agreed to send military transport and medical teams to the Gulf in support of a possible U.S.-led strike against Iraq, Foreign Minister Guido Di Tella announced Friday.

Officials said however, that the country's participation would be mostly symbolic and said the troops would not engage in combat in the region.

The Dutch government on Friday also said it will send a frigate to the Gulf if all diplomatic solutions to resolve the crisis with Iraq have been exhausted, Foreign Minister Hans van Mierlo said.

U.S. President Bill Clinton urged New Zealand and Spain to join the group of nations backing the threat of using force against Iraq to gain "free and unfettered" access for

(Continued on page 7)



Anti-riot police attack demonstrators who staged a pro-Iraqi rally Friday despite a government ban. Several hundred baton-wielding policemen beat up the demonstrators who chanted slogans in support of Iraq (Reuters photo)

Police disperse thousands at illegal pro-Iraqi rally

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Police on Friday foiled an attempt by the opposition parties to hold a rally in support of Iraq in downtown Amman. Hundreds of anti-riot police, armed with guns, dogs, batons and tear gas canisters dispersed thousands of people following the Friday prayers at the Al Hussein Mosque.

Supporters of the Islamic Action Front (IAF), the political arm of the powerful Muslim Brotherhood movement, and of other smaller parties shouted pro-Iraq slogans.

"By our souls and blood we will sacrifice ourselves for Iraq," the demonstrators chanted as a police helicopter was hovering, high above the area.

Police beat the demonstrators forcing them back

into the mosque.

Police later entered the mosque and arrested more than 60 people, including Brotherhood leaders.

Three journalists, who were covering the incident were detained for a while but released afterwards.

Several party leaders, including former speaker of the Lower House, Suleiman Arar, who is the head of Al Mustaqbal Party, were among those beaten by police, witnesses said.

The rally, barred by the authorities, was meant to show support for Iraq in its current standoff with the U.S.

During a meeting with the party leaders at the Prime Ministry Thursday, Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali told the organisers that the government would not approve the rally lest it be infiltrated by saboteurs.

In a statement yesterday the government said it prevented the rally because it had concrete evidence that there were saboteurs who wanted to use the occasion for rioting.

"Despite the clear position of the prime minister, the leaders of political parties and professional unions assembled following the Friday prayers at the mosque's court and started pro-Iraq slogans," the statement said.

"The security forces have taken necessary measures to prevent demonstrators from holding their procession because they have concrete information that saboteurs, whose goal was to instigate riots and disturbances, were among the demonstrators."

The IAF described the

(Continued on page 7)

Palestinian, Israeli hurt in West Bank clashes

IALAZOUN REFUGEE CAMP (AP) — Palestinian teenagers stoned an Israeli military convoy outside this refugee camp Friday, and troops jumped out of their vehicles and responded with rubber-coated bullets.

An Israeli soldier was hit in the face by a rock, and five Palestinians were injured by the army rubber-coated bullets.

The clash came only a day after Palestinian President Yasser Arafat threatened to "cross out" the peace agreements with Israel and unleash a new uprising if there was no progress in the deadlocked negotiations with Israel.

The incident began when dozens of teenagers left the camp's mosque after Friday noon prayers and began chanting slogans in support of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, ignoring appeals by older residents to honour a Palestinian National Authority (PNA) ban on such rallies.

Some of the marchers approached the West Bank's main north-south road and threw stones at an Israeli army convoy. Soldiers jumped out of their vehicles and began firing rubber bullets at the stone-throwers in the camp below.

Three jeeps drove into the camp to chase stone-throwers who quickly sought cover in

Jewish organisation seeks to annul land sale in Jerusalem

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AP) — A Jewish religious foundation is seeking to annul its sale of land in an Arab neighbourhood of Jerusalem to Miami millionaire Irving Moskowitz, a lawyer said Friday.

The legal action raises new questions about whether Mr. Moskowitz will be able to go ahead with plans to build 132 settlement units for Jews in the Ras Al Amoud in Arab east Jerusalem, the sector claimed by the Palestinians as a future capital.

Mr. Moskowitz is a patron of Jewish settler groups that hope to strengthen Israel's hold over Arab east Jerusalem by moving into Arab neighbourhoods such as Ras Al Amoud, home to 11,000 Palestinians.

Last month, the

Moskowitz project in Ras Al Amoud was approved by the interior ministry, but Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he would block construction so as not to trigger riots.

In an unexpected twist, the Wohlin foundation which sold Mr. Moskowitz half of the four-acre plot in 1992, is now trying to get the deal annulled, arguing the land was never official appraisal and sold far under value, said the foundation's lawyer, Rafael Stuh. The land was sold for some \$221,000, or one-fifth of its actual value, Mr. Stuh said.

The foundation took its case to a rabbinical court which has jurisdiction because the land under dispute has been classified as a religious endowment.

around the officers. Some turned ones on the main road. Several pro-Iraq demonstrations in the West Bank this week have led to clashes between Israelis and Palestinians. The barometer of tension in the West Bank and Gaza has

(Continued on page 7)

Israeli committee blames Netanyahu for Mossad murder bid fiasco

TEL AVIV (AFP) — An Israeli parliamentary committee holds Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu responsible for a botched assassination bid against a Hamas leader in Jordan last year, a newspaper reported on Friday.

The committee held that Mr. Netanyahu "exercised faulty judgement and showed poor execution" over the attack by Israel's Mossad secret service against Hamas leader Khaled Misha'al in Amman in September, the Haaretz newspaper said.

"Overall the subcommittee found that the operation had been a failure and was riddled with mistakes during the planning and training stages, as well as during the actual execution," the newspaper said.

The affair was investigated by a subcommittee of the Knesset's (parliament) foreign affairs and defence committee which is due to present its report to the prime minister in the next few days, it said.

Haaretz said all six members of the subcommittee agreed that even if Mr. Netanyahu acted wrongly

"this does not warrant his removal from office."

However, the Labour Party's Ehud Barak and Ori Orr and Yossi Sarid of Meretz, all of the opposition, and Ze'ev Binyamin Benin of Mr. Netanyahu's Likud Party found fault with prime minister for the fiasco.

The two other subcommittee members, foreign affairs and defence committee chairman Uzi Landau and Gideon Ezra, both of Likud, plan to issue a minority report saying the prime minister's judgement was sound and that Israel must fight terrorist leaders wherever they are, Haaretz said.

Another point of contention was the personal responsibility of Mossad chief Danny Yatom for the operation. Five of the subcommittee members said Mr. Yatom could remain in his post, while Mr. Sarid disagreed, saying he did their best. Nor should "personal conclusions" be drawn against the head of the Mossad's operations branch, who was responsible for planning the attack.

(Continued on page 7)

Bombing Iraq seen as West's 'least bad option' but may spell end to UNSCOM mission

By Paul Taylor
Reuters

LONDON — Western strategists are increasingly convinced that bombing Iraq offers the "least bad option" to constrain Iraqi President Saddam Hussein from developing biological and chemical weapons.

With little sign of a diplomatic solution that would guarantee U.N. monitors unlimited access to suspected weapons of mass destruction sites, policy analysts say the choice is between accepting a fast-eroding inspection regime and using force to set

back President Hussein's programme. They acknowledged that a few days of intensive air strikes are unlikely either to destroy all of Iraq's suspected unconventional weapons or to get rid of Mr. Hussein.

Some experts believe bombing Iraq could spell an end to the mission of the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) that has been searching for and dismantling Iraq's chemical and biological arms programmes and hasten the crumbling of economic sanctions on Baghdad.

Critics also warn of a poten-

tially violent anti-Western backlash in the Arab World, especially if civilian casualties are heavy, and a serious blow to relations with Russia, which has invested much diplomatic prestige in trying to broker a settlement.

But most strategists argue that the alternative — accepting a diplomatic solution that falls short of total, unfettered access to all suspect sites — would weaken Western interests in the Middle East, set back worldwide deterrence of the spread of mass destruction weapons and store up more trouble for the near

future. "We should choose the least bad of a set of terrible options and attack Iraq at the earliest opportunity," said Robert Blackwill, a former U.S. ambassador and assistant to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

Mr. Blackwill, who now teaches at Harvard University, told Britain's Royal Institute of International Affairs that the United States' ability to project power in the Gulf region and lead Middle East peace efforts could be fatally compromised if the Iraqi leader acquired weapons of

mass destruction and the missiles to deliver them.

He said that after an initial bombing blitz, President Hussein should be given a breather with a deadline to grant UNSCOM unfettered access to suspect sites, failing which he would incur further waves of air strikes.

While British and American leaders stress the credibility of the U.N. Security Council is at stake, Mr. Blackwill argued that the real challenge was to America's global deterrence.

"What would leaders in Pyongyang or Beijing think if

the United States backed down in the Middle East?" he asked.

Jonathan Eyal, director of studies at the Royal United Services Institute, said that while the West could not hope to eliminate Iraq's entire unconventional weapons programme by bombing, it was equally justifiable to try to slow down his programme.

"The question is less about the wisdom of launching an air strike than about post-strike management," Mr. Eyal told Reuters in an interview. "How do you retain the possibility of escalating while

hiring him hard enough in the first instance? How do you react to what Saddam does next, which might be military retaliation, hostage-taking or the expulsion of UNSCOM? At what stage do you declare victory and put a stop to the operation?"

American strategy in the Gulf was based on keeping Iraq weak but not so weak that it would disgorge its problems on its neighbours, keeping Iran weak but not so weak that it did not counter-balance Iraq, and propping up pro-Western dictatorships elsewhere, he said.

Mr. Eyal dismissed the significance of any anti-Western backlash that military action might trigger.

"The purveyors of gloom in the run-up to the 1991 Gulf war were uniformly wrong," he said.

Some strategists also say the United States would lose leverage with both Israel and moderate Arab states if it backed down in the Gulf but would have an incentive to push Arab-Israeli peace negotiations more aggressively if it did strike Iraq, to counter charges of a "double standard."

No plans to use Jordanian territory for strike against Iraq — U.S. ambassador

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — U.S. Ambassador to Amman Wesley Egan Jr. Thursday said there was no plan to use Jordanian territory in a possible military strike against Iraq.

Speaking at a press conference at the U.S. Embassy, the ambassador denied that there were any American troops stationed in the Kingdom.

"I can assure you that except the military staff in the embassy, there are no American military personnel in Jordan," Mr. Egan said. "I am not aware of any plans to station U.S. military personnel in Jordan."

The U.S. ambassador said that the two countries will conduct scheduled bilateral military exercises this year "but there are none under way now."

The American official

said a possible strike against Iraq will not include sending U.S. ground troops inside Iraqi territories.

"I know of no plan to use ground troops in Iraq. Our view is that the territorial integrity of Iraq is fundamental to the stability of the region," he added.

"We would not support the creation of a Kurdish state in the north. We would not support or be involved in anything that would have the effect of breaking Iraq apart," said the ambassador.

But, "if the decision to use military force is taken," said Mr. Egan, "it will be substantial. You will not be able to describe it as pin-point. It will take little time."

"Given the nature of the threat, the use of military force has to do a lot, a lot of things have to be done successfully. It is a challenge," he added.

"Iraqi civilians will not be

targeted... only the weapons, weapons systems and the capacity to use and deliver these weapons will be targeted," added the U.S. diplomat.

"The use of military force is not inevitable. It is our hope that this option will not have to be exercised and there is time for the discussion that are under way," he added.

"But if it becomes clear that the discussions under way are not making progress or if it becomes clear that discussions are only the next chapter in a process of delay, or a process of restricting UNSCOM works, if the judgement is made that [is] what is happening... then based on that judgement, the president will address the issue of use of military force," he said.

"But I repeat that it is an option we clearly would prefer not to have to use," added the ambassador.

Mr. Egan denied news reports that the U.S. Embassy in Amman had recommended that the government ban any pro-Iraq rallies.

"The rumour is absolutely false," said the ambassador. "I have had no conversation, nor did anybody in my embassy... with any authority in your government. This rumour is 100 per cent false."

The ambassador said that his country would extend what ever assistance the Kingdom might need as a result of a possible U.S. strike against Iraq.

"If the situation develops in which there were emergency needs that Jordan had as a result of this crisis, I think you would find Jordan's friend and the international community responsive," said Mr. Egan.



BOMBING IN ALGIERS: People look at the debris after a bomb exploded in a cafe in Bab Al Oued, near the ancient Casbah in Algiers Thursday. The bomb killed one person and injured 14 others (AP photo)

Turkish prosecutor demands sentences of eight to 15 years for reporter's death

ANKARA (AFP) — The prosecution demanded prison sentences of eight to fifteen years Friday for six policemen standing trial over the death of a journalist in police custody, the Anatolia news agency reported.

Metin Goktepe, 27-year-old reporter for the leftist

daily Evrensel, was beaten to death by a group of policemen, according to witnesses, after his arrest on Jan. 8, 1996 in Istanbul. Goktepe had been covering the funeral of two prisoners killed in a riot at Istanbul's Umraniye prison when he was detained.

Five other policemen implicated in the death of the reporter were released by the court last September. The trial opened in the western town of Aydin, not in Istanbul, for "security reasons," and was later moved to Afyon with the same explanation.

Goktepe's death in detention had triggered widespread protests in Turkey, with thousands attending the funeral in Istanbul. Despite the remote venue, many spectators and human rights activists travelled to Afyon to follow the case.

Saudi prince calls on Saddam to hear 'voice of reason'

CAIRO (AP) — Saudi Arabia's crown prince urged Iraqi President Saddam Hussein on Thursday to listen to the "voice of reason" and spare Iraqi civilians the punishment of a U.S. military strike.

Crown Prince Abdullah, in Cairo to discuss the Iraqi crisis with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, is among Arab leaders seeking a diplomatic end to the standoff over U.N. inspections of suspected weapons sites.

He has said Saudi Arabia won't allow U.S. fighters to stage strikes from bases in his country to press their point.

"I call on President Saddam Hussein to listen... to

the voice of reason and political awareness and to implement the U.N. Security Council's resolutions," Prince Abdullah said at the Cairo international airport before meeting with Mr. Mubarak.

President Hussein must "spare the Iraqi people the coming threat."

After meeting with President Mubarak, Prince Abdullah said both were committed to a negotiated solution. "The Iraqi people will suffer more if reason is ignored and previous experiences are not remembered," Prince Abdullah was quoted as saying by Egypt's Middle East News Agency.

Prince Abdullah later left

Cairo.

In Damascus, President Hafez Assad met with a Kuwaiti delegation, including the foreign minister and ambassador to Syria.

Kuwaiti State Minister Abdul Aziz Al Dakhil said the crisis requires "consultation and coordination."

The United States has threatened military strikes if Iraq does not allow inspections of suspected weapons sites. Only after the United Nations has verified that Iraq is free of weapons of mass destruction will it lift sweeping sanctions imposed following the 1991 Gulf war.

Iraq has repeatedly stressed it destroyed all these weapons.

Iraqi opposition says Saddam will back down

KUWAIT CITY (AFP) — Iraq's leading Shiite opposition figure Mohammed Baqer Al Hakim said Iraqi President Saddam Hussein will take "a step back" to avoid a military strike, a Kuwaiti newspaper reported Friday.

"I expect to see Saddam Hussein take a step back at the last minute because he has repeatedly backed down in the past," Mr. Hakim said in an interview in Al Rai Al Am.

"Saddam is determined to hold on to power no matter how hard he is hit, even if Iraq is completely destroyed," said Mr. Hakim, leader of the Tehran-based Supreme Assembly of the Iraqi Islamic Revolution.

On the question of a possible military coup in Iraq following any strike by the United States and Britain, Mr. Hakim said: "Anything could happen in Iraq, especially as the army has been humiliated by the regime and feels hatred towards it."

The United States and Britain have threatened to launch a military strike against Iraq if the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) for disarmament is not permitted unconditional and unrestricted access to all sites in Iraq.

Rival Kurd parties agree to continue ceasefire

DUBAI (AFP) — Two rival Kurdish factions have agreed to continue a ceasefire concluded at the beginning of the fasting month of Ramadan six weeks ago, a joint statement said Thursday.

The statement said that in a four-hour meeting, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) agreed on the need to resolve their problems through dialogue and not violence.

They also agreed to free all prisoners unconditional-

ly, end expulsions from the respective territories they control and welcome back those who had been expelled, and end press campaigns against each other.

United Nations spokesman Eric Falt said earlier it was the first high-level meeting between the two Kurdish factions which control northern Iraq since the ceasefire in December.

The KDP and the PUK met on the ceasefire line in the region of Shiklaw, he said. "There are more meetings planned in the next

few days." "The two factions have clashed on and off since 1993, after having shared control of northern Iraq in defiance of Baghdad since the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf war. More than 3,000 people have died in the fighting.

But "the fact is that northern Iraq is now more quiet than it has been for months," said Mr. Falt.

"The implications are obviously positive for the implementation of the Security Council Resolution 986 in that region," he

said, referring to the U.N. oil-for-food accord.

"The distribution of food has been very regular in recent weeks, and for the first time since the arrival of drugs last May medicines are available in quantities in the health centres of northern Iraq," said Mr. Falt.

Under the oil-for-food deal, sanctions-hit Iraq is authorised to sell limited amounts of crude to finance imports of food and medicine. The United Nations distributes the supplies in the north.

Iraq has 64 Iranian 'spies' in jail — Iraqi foreign minister

CAIRO (AFP) — Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Said Al Sahhaf said 64 Iranian "spies" are being held in Iraqi jails, an Arab newspaper reported on Friday.

"We currently have 64 men from Iranian intelligence agencies in Iraqi prisons," Mr. Sahhaf said at a dinner on Wednesday night in Cairo. Al Hayat newspaper reported.

Mr. Sahhaf said that during his visit to Tehran last month, Iranian President Mohammad Khatami asked him to free the prisoners. However, he did not disclose his response, nor give

the date the Iranians were arrested.

He accused Iran, which was at war with Iraq from 1980-88, of betraying his country during the 1991 Gulf war.

"During the war in 1991, the Iranians betrayed us. They did not respect our borders. They pillaged, dispersed [our citizens] and stabbed us in the back," Mr. Sahhaf said.

But he noted that Iran was currently opposed to a U.S. strike against Iraq over the U.N. weapons inspections crisis "and I believe we have settled the situation

with them."

A report in The Times newspaper on Thursday said senior intelligence and security officials from Iran and Iraq met secretly to forge an alliance in the face of the growing U.S. military build-up in the Gulf.

The British newspaper said the meeting, if confirmed, would provide evidence that the once bitter foes are developing new contacts and putting aside, for the time being at least, obstacles that have blocked normalisation of ties since their war.

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16:10Twinkle
16:30French Programmes
18:00Square One TV
18:30Neighbours
19:00Le Journal
19:15Documentary
19:30News headlines
19:35You Bet Your Life
20:00Cinema, Cinema
20:30Prism
21:10Time Trax
22:00News in English
22:30Feature film: "The Boy Who Drank Too Much"
23:15Comedy — "The Respected Family"

PRAYER TIMES

04:58Fajr
06:16(Sunrise) Dhuha
11:50Dhuhr
14:56Asr
17:24Maghreb
18:42Isha

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Assemblies of God Church Tel.
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WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology
Cold weather conditions will prevail with skies cloudy to partly cloudy. Occasional rain-fall is expected and winds

westerly to northwesterly moderate to active. In Aqaba, skies will be partly cloudy, scattered showers are expected, winds northerly moderate, and seas calm.
Min/Max temp.04/10
Aqaba09/19
Deserts03/13
Jordan Valley08/18

Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 09 Aqaba 18 Humidity readings: Amman 82 per cent, Aqaba 54 per cent.

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NIGHT DUTY
AMMAN:
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Dr. Wafiq Qaddumi893542
Dr. Nasser Ibrahim830432
Dr. Bahjat Bader832642
Firas pharmacy5661912
Ferdous pharmacy778336
Al Asema pharmacy637055
Nairoukh pharmacy623672
Al Salam pharmacy636730
Yacoub pharmacy644945

Shmeisani pharmacy637660
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Food Control Centre637111
Civil Defence Department566111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue630341
Civil Defence Emergency199
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Fire Brigade617101
Blood Bank775121
Highway Police843402
Traffic Police896390
Public Security Department630321
Hotel Complaints5605800
Price Complaints5661176
Water and Sewerage Complaints897467
Amman Municipality Complaints787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance)121
Overseas Calls010230
Central Amman Telephone Repairs623101

Abdali Telephone Repairs775111/26
Najib pharmacy891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital 5602240/50
Amal Hospital5674155
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery865199
ZARQA:
Electric Power Company636381
RJ Flight Information 44-53200
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Khalid Maternity, J. Amn644281/6
Aklieh Maternity, J. Amn642441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity642362
Malhas, J. Amman636140
Palestine, Shmeisani5607071
Shmeisani Hospital5669131
University Hospital845845
Al-Muasher Hospital566727/9
The Islamic, Abdali566126/37
Al-Ahli, Abdali566416/46
Italian, Al-Muhajreen777101/3
Al-Bashir, J. Ashrafieh

Army, Marka775111/26
Queen Alia Hospital 5602240/50
Amal Hospital5674155
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery865199
ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital09983323
Zarqa National Hospital09900560
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Al Hikam Modern Hospital09990990
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Princess Basma Hospital02127555
Greek Catholic Hospital02127275
Ibn Al Nafes Hospital021247100
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FOR THE TRAVELLER

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ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
08:25Damascus (RJ)
09:30New Delhi (RJ)
09:55Karachi, Dubai (RJ)
10:05Beirut (RJ)
10:15Doha, Bahrain (RJ)
10:30Colombo (RJ)
14:45Linz (Austria) (add) (RJ)
15:00New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
16:20Cairo (RJ)
17:40London, Berlin (RJ)
19:50Frankfurt (RJ)
05:15Bangkok (RJ)

Other Flights
09:30Al 'Arish (PF)
13:15Riyadh (SV)
15:05Vienna (OS)
18:00Dubai, Damascus (EK)
21:10Paris, Damascus (AF)
22:30Athens (OA)
22:35Cairo (MS)
23:30London, Beirut (BA)
23:35Amsterdam (KL)
03:25Rome (AZ)

Royal Wings (RW)
(No flights on Saturday)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
05:55Linz (Austria) (add) (RJ)
06:30Beirut (RJ)
09:55Frankfurt (RJ)
11:30Amsterdam, New York (RJ)
12:00Milan Madrid (RJ)
12:00Geneva, Brussels (RJ)
12:10Paris (RJ)
12:15London (RJ)
12:30Cairo (RJ)
20:05Riyadh, Dhahran (RJ)
20:15Bombay (RJ)
20:20Larnaca (RJ)
21:00Abu Dhabi, Dubai (RJ)
21:35Jeddah (RJ)

Other Flights
07:00Beirut (ME)
10:30Al 'Arish (Marka Airport) (PF)
14:15Abu Dhabi, Bahrain (GF)
14:45Riyadh (SV)
15:50Vienna (OS)
19:00Dubai (EK)
23:35Damascus, Paris (AF)
00:35Amsterdam (KL)
03:00Athens (AZ)
04:20Rome (OA)

Royal Wings (RW)
(No flights on Saturday)

Queen chairs round table on child labour in Jordan

AMMAN (J.T.) — Her Majesty Queen Noor Thursday chaired a round table session on child labour, during which the National Task Force for Children (NTFC) Research and Database Centre presented the major findings of its pilot study on child labour in Jordan, which was done in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), according to a press release.

The round table will lead in a national workshop to present and discuss the study and recommendations for a plan of action.

Queen Noor, who is the NTFC chair, said that although child labour in Jordan is not a problem of great scale, indicators have shown that it is on the rise, thus necessitating preventative action.

She added that the ILO has supported studies on child labour in Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen since 1997 and that the NTFC pilot study will be a component of the ILO's report on the status of child labour in the world. The study focuses on "the causes, conditions and consequences of child labour," rather than the magnitude of the problem, which will be covered in a later national survey, the statement

said. The Queen noted that the NTFC study placed an important emphasis on working children's responses and opinions. This approach reflects the basic precept of the NTFC, which considers children as major players in identifying solutions to their problems, she said.

According to the NTFC study, the only available statistics on child labour in Jordan are from employment surveys conducted periodically since 1961. The surveys indicated that the majority working children were engaged in agricultural, craft, trade and elementary occupations, with 42 per cent of the children working long hours exceeding 49 hours per week.

The NTFC field survey showed that "over 50 per cent of the employed children earned less than JD30 a month" and were exposed to a variety of occupational hazards as well as physical abuse and in some cases sexual harassment. The survey cited the children's main causes for child labour were "helping the family financially, gaining work experience, avoiding school and lack of recreational activities."

Children's rights have assumed enormous impor-

tance in both national and international law. The U.N. General Assembly adopted in 1989 the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which confers upon children a full spectrum of civil, social, cultural and economic rights.

Jordan ratified the Arab and International Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1984 and 1991 respectively and launched the National Plan of Action for Children 1993-2000, which encompassed the fields of health, education, environment and development. The National Task Force for Children (NTFC) was established in 1995 as a coordinating agency to monitor the condition and status of children in accordance with the Arab and International Conventions on the Rights of the Child and the National Plan of Action for Children.

The NTFC is compiling comprehensive data to highlight children's unmet needs and rights through its Research and Database Centre and will disseminate information to all concerned institutions. It will develop, in cooperation with the coalition members, model action programmes and launch public awareness campaigns to advocate their implementation, the statement concluded.

Majali calls on Israeli government to work on rebuilding confidence in peace process

AMMAN (J.T.) — Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali has called on the Israeli government to work towards rebuilding confidence in the peace process and removing suspicion and tension by carrying out concrete actions to ensure its success.

At a meeting with visiting Israeli Foreign Ministry Director Eytan Ben Tzur on Thursday, the prime minister said Israel should respond favourably and

practically to the Arab parties' desire for peace rather than limiting its reactions to propaganda statements.

Accusing Israel of placing obstacles in the path of the peace process, Dr. Majali said Jordan has based its strategy on a real and permanent peace.

It seems that Israel has forgotten that peace requires an element of mutual confidence between the concerned parties in order to be achieved, said

the prime minister.

Israel only speaks about peace and agreements but does not take steps toward translating these agreements into facts on the ground, especially with regard to the accords with the Palestinians, he added.

Dr. Majali asked that Israel adopt a positive stand in its negotiations with the Palestinians to enable them to secure their legitimate rights on their national soil in implementation of the

agreements signed between the two sides.

Informed sources quoted Mr. Ben Tzur as saying that Israel was seeking to bolster its relations with Jordan in all fields.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed developments in the peace process as well as the Iraq-U.N. crisis, with Dr. Majali reiterating Jordan's opposition to any military strike against Iraq and its full support for diplomatic efforts

to find a peaceful solution, according to the sources.

The meeting was also attended by Deputy Prime Minister Jawad Anani, Foreign Minister Fayez Tarawneh, Jordanian Ambassador to Israel Omar Ritai and Israeli Ambassador to Jordan Oded Eran.

Dr. Tarawneh earlier had a separate meeting with Mr. Ben Tzur, who also met Senate Speaker Zeid Rifai before returning home.

French pianist Giusiano back in Amman

By Jean-Claude Elias
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Amman loved him and he must have loved Amman, for Philippe Giusiano is back for another much-awaited piano concert.

Giusiano's previous performance in the Kingdom, in January 1997, was mainly dedicated to the music of Frederic Chopin. This time, the virtuoso will also play works by Maurice Ravel and Sergei Rachmaninoff in addition to a sonata by Chopin. The concert will take place at the Royal Cultural Centre on Saturday at 8:00 p.m.

The event is being held under the patronage of Her Majesty Queen Noor and is organised by the SOS Children Villages Association — to whom all proceeds will be donated — in cooperation with the French Cultural Centre.

Giusiano belongs to the small group of truly great pianists. He began studying the piano at the age of five in his hometown Marseille, and

started collecting awards and prizes at the early age of 12. One of his masters at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris was the celebrated Jacques Rouvier, a renowned specialist of Ravel's repertoire.

Philippe Giusiano possesses all the qualities that make a concert performer — flawless technique, self-assurance and a deep understanding of the pieces he is playing. What makes him great, however, is his natural talent. Giusiano plays with his soul as much as he plays with his mind or his fingers. He fell deeply in love with Chopin piano works when he was a child, and now at 25, he has reached full musical maturity.

Saturday's recital will allow Amman's music lovers to enjoy Ravel's "Miroirs pour Piano," Rachmaninoff's "2nd Sonata in B flat minor, op.36" and Chopin's "3rd Sonata in B minor, op.58."

Two arrested in connection with 1997 murder

By Rama Hussein
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Police on Friday announced they arrested a man and his son and charged them with the murder of a 26-year-old man in the Wadi Rum area in Jabal Al Nasser in November 1997, according to judicial sources.

Tawfiq Mohammad Hawari's decomposed body was found dumped in a deserted area near the quarry in Wadi Rum on Nov. 20. Coroners determined that the man's skull had been crushed by a flint stone.

Authorities then said JD500

were missing from the victim. No arrests were made and the case was filed under the unsolved murders in the Kingdom.

The judicial source told the Jordan Times that the two suspects, identified only as M.H., 57, and his son, A., 19, were arrested on Thursday following new evidence that linked the suspects with the murder.

The source said the evidence emerged after Criminal Prosecutor Imad Kilani questioned the suspects and more than eight witnesses "who presented evidence which contradicted the preliminary testimonies of the

suspects."

The witnesses testified that the two suspects were sleeping in the pastures near the quarry on the night of the murder, contradicting the preliminary testimonies of the two suspects, the source said.

When questioned by the authorities a few days after the murder occurred, the two suspects said they were sleeping in their house, not near the quarry, the source said.

But after questioning the wife of one of the suspects, the source maintained, "she informed us that her husband spent the night near the quarry."

The authorities also heard testimony by witnesses confirming that the suspect's son had constant disputes with Mr. Hawari over his right to graze his sheep near their land.

The witnesses confirmed that both suspects knew that the victim "always carried large amount of money on him, and plotted to kill him because they both suffered from financial problems."

According to the judicial source, both suspects will be interrogated by Criminal Prosecutor Imad Kilani today, who is expected to press pre-meditated charges against them.

Princess Alia celebrates birthday

AMMAN (J.T.) — Her Royal Highness Princess Alia Bint Al Hussein celebrated her birthday on Friday.

Born on Feb. 13, 1956, the Princess first studied at The Ahliyah School in Amman before completing her secondary school education in London.

Princess Alia graduated at

the top of her class with a degree in English from the University of Jordan in 1972.

The Princess is president of the Pan-Arab Society for Arabian Horses and honorary chairperson of a number of clubs and voluntary and charitable societies.

Princess Alia is continually involved in efforts to



boost women's rights and promote better services for Jordanian children.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Crown Prince sends condolences to Sudanese president

AMMAN (Petra) — HRH Crown Prince Hassan on Friday sent condolences to Sudanese President Omar Hassan Al Bashir over the death of senior Sudanese officials in a plane crash. The Crown Prince voiced his deep sorrow for this tragic incident.

Jordan, Tunisia agree on environmental cooperation

AMMAN (J.T.) — A memorandum of understanding on environmental cooperation was concluded Thursday between Jordan and Tunisia. The agreement, signed by Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs and the Environment Tawfiq Khreishan and Tunisian Minister of Environment Mohammad Mahdi Malikah, provides for exchanging environmental expertise.

Khader Zahran, editor of Akhbar Al Usbou, dies at 66

AMMAN (J.T.) — Minister of State for Information Affairs Samir Mutawi on Friday announced the death of Khader Odeh Zahran, the editor in chief of the weekly Akhbar Al Usbou. Zahran passed away on Thursday at the age of 66. He served the Arab press for 30 years.

Swedish FM arrives today

AMMAN (J.T.) — Swedish Foreign Minister Lena Hjelm-Wallen today starts a three-day official visit to the Kingdom, during which she will hold talks with His Majesty King Hussein, HRH Crown Prince Hassan and senior Jordanian officials. Her talks will focus on bilateral relations and the latest political developments in the Middle East.

what's going on

PIANO RECITAL

* Piano recital by French pianist Philippe Giusiano at the Royal Cultural Centre at 8:00 p.m. to perform pieces by Chopin, Ravel and Rachmaninoff.

FILMS

* Cuban film "Lucia" (in Spanish with subtitles in English) at Instituto Cervantes, Jabal Amman, on Sunday, Feb. 15 at 5:00 p.m.

* Film (in English) on studying at German universities (parts III and IV) at Goethe-Institut, Jabal Amman on Sunday, Feb. 15, at 4:30 p.m.

PLAY

* Children's play "A Theatre Dream" at the Royal Cultural Centre at 10:00 a.m. (daily until Feb. 21).

CONCERTS

* Two musical concerts by the Austrian Unicorn Ensemble and students of the National Music Conservatory at the Royal Cultural Centre on Sunday, Feb. 15 and Monday, Feb. 16 at 8:00 p.m. respectively.

EXHIBITIONS

* Paintings by Sudanese artist Salah Al Murr at Baladna Art Gallery, Gardens Street, until Feb. 23.

* Valentine's Day bazaar at Jordan Design and Trade Centre of Noor Al Hussein Foundation, off Wadi Sagra Street (Tel. 5699141/2), until Feb. 14.

* Private collection of Mamdouh Bishara entitled "A Vision, An Identity" at Darat Al Fann, Jabal Weibdeh, until March 5 (Tel. 643251). Also displaying works by contemporary Arab artists — "The New Collection."

High school student marketing Jordan around the world via the Internet

By Ahmed Naser
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Over 3.5 million global Internet surfers have visited a site developed by a 10th grader in April to promote Jordan's tourism sites and provide essential information to potential visitors.

While Jordan has spent millions of dollars over the years on glossy advertising brochures and promotion campaigns to lure tourists, Mahdi W. Bseiso opted for a free-of-charge around-the-clock medium available to 80 million worldwide.

The 15-year-old Jubilee School student told the Jordan Times that he planned to provide the contents of his site in

Russian, French and German. "But I am a little reluctant to provide the content in Arabic, as the majority of Web surfers have no suitable means to view the language," he said.

At present, the bulk of Arabic web sites take the form of images, which require a long time to load.

Mahdi said most users lose interest in sites that take too long to load — Jordan's low quality copper phone lines are a poor medium for data-transfer.

Mahdi said it took him two months to learn Java, an advanced Internet programming language, and two weeks to set up his own site on the World Wide Web (WWW). Visitors to the site are greet-

ed with the Jordanian national anthem, a process that takes a few seconds to load and only requires surfers to have a sound card to listen to it.

Mahdi's site, named www.geocities.com/EnchantingForest.htm, gives essential information about the Kingdom — picture clips and information on Amman, Jerash, Petra, Aqaba, Wadi Rum and other areas famed for their archaeological riches.

"I started the project after a month of research, including reading brochures that were sent to me by the Department of Antiquities and visiting the Ministry of Tourism," he said.

His school teachers are also encouraging his initiative and talent by helping him gather

information so that the site can be updated on a regular basis.

He said he has been commissioned to design an Internet site for his school as a graduation project. It will be launched before the school transfers to its new permanent headquarters between Jubbah and Yajouz in May.

Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Akel Biltaji presented Mahdi with a medal to express his gratitude for the student's help in promoting Jordan worldwide.

FirstNet also gave him a free Internet account, while AccessArabia and Arabia Online offered to host his web site on their servers, thereby making his site available at more than one WWW address.

Correspondents for foreign papers questioning PPD's enforcement of law

By Alia Shukri Hamzeh
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The Press and Publication Department (PPD) is cracking down on Jordanian media correspondents for violating 1995 regulations by working for foreign newspapers without being members of the Jordan Press Association (JPA).

But many correspondents said the PPD was being selective in enforcing the regulations governing their operations and claimed it was targeting only a handful because of their coverage of sensitive Jordanian issues.

Salameh Ne'matt, Jordan correspondent for the Al Hayat Arabic newspaper since 1989, said PPD Director General Bilal

Tal ordered the confiscation of around 20 Al Hayat editions upon entry into Amman over the last three months on grounds that he is not a legal correspondent.

Jordan correspondent for Al Quds Al Arabi, Bassam Badarin, a JPA member, said Mr. Tal had ordered the seizure of 33 editions of the daily and was taking legal action against him for his perceived anti-Jordanian writings. Both newspapers are published in London.

Mr. Badarin said Mr. Tal specifically ordered him not to cover the activities of the Islamist-led opposition, which boycotted the Nov. 4 elections to protest government policies and remains a vocal critic of Jordan's 1994 peace treaty with

Israel.

"Mr. Tal informed me that he had filed a lawsuit against me for giving Jordan a bad reputation abroad and harming its relations with fellow Arab countries. He also threatened to jail me," Mr. Badarin said.

However, he said he had not received any legal notification of the case.

For his part, Mr. Tal rejected claims by both correspondents and said he was only ensuring that correspondents observed the law.

"The law has to be implemented. Either we live in a country governed by law or we do not," Mr. Tal told the Jordan Times.

"I did not issue warnings to anybody and I only confiscated a couple of newspaper editions

for not fulfilling the requirements of the law."

But both Mr. Badarin and Mr. Ne'matt disagreed.

"Mr. Tal sent two letters to my editors asking them to send accreditation for a new correspondent in Amman because I am not a member of the JPA, and according to the 1995 regulations, non-JPA members are not allowed to practise the profession," Mr. Ne'matt told the Jordan Times.

He said he had met with Mr. Tal and explained to him that for personal reasons, he opted not to join the JPA. Mr. Ne'matt insisted no one had the right to force him join the association.

"The JPA adopts political positions which I completely disagree with, so why should I

join any association that does not correspond with my views?" he asked.

"But Mr. Tal told me that if I did not join the association, then he would have to implement the law either by taking me to court, or by taking an administrative order and putting me in jail because I am practising the profession illegally and because my writings tarnish Jordan's image abroad."

He said Mr. Tal should first organise local newspapers by ensuring that their correspondents were JPA members before focusing on the foreign press.

"The PPD is pursuing its media clampdown by targeting foreign correspondents, which in turn could be dangerous and harmful to all sides," Mr. Ne-

matt said. "They are making a mistake...they are putting Jordan's reputation at risk," he said.

"I do not understand Mr. Tal's approach and why he insists on alienating us, resorting to threats and clampdowns. He should stop issuing threats and categorising journalists as enemies of the country. He should handle the situation with a little more insight," Mr. Badarin said.

Lawyer Asma Khader said the PPD had no right to use administrative orders to put journalists in jail because any media violations are punished by a fine. "Mr. Ne'matt or any other correspondent can file a lawsuit against the PPD if this happens," she told the Jordan Times.

Rioting erupts in three neighbouring Indonesian cities

JAKARTA (AFP) — Rioting erupted in three Indonesian cities Friday sparked by two days of violence in the neighbouring town of Jatiwangi, police and residents said.

Mobs took to the streets of Ciamen, Pamanukan and Indramayu, they added, and riot police and troops had been rushed to the cities on the northern coast of Java Island.

More than 1,000 people rampaged in Pamanukan for more than 10 hours before the riot was brought under control with the help of military and police units rushed from other parts of West Java province, police Second Sergeant Abdul Waham said from the nearby city of Subang.

"I am not authorised to inform you of anything else, and I have not received reports of casualties or damage at this point," he added.

However, other police in Subang and the regional centre of Indramayu earlier said shops and restaurants had been gutted by fire.

In Ciamen, 80 kilometres east of here, dozens of shops were destroyed and 15 cars burned, residents said. Residents of Indramayu said shops there had been looted. However, police in the city reported no incidents of unrest.

The rioting took place in Pamanukan despite major deployments of police and troops through the day, added a police officer speaking from Subang, 30 kilometres south of Pamanukan.

"The entire troops of the Subang police office went out to take care of the situation," he added, saying the district's whole military force had also been deployed. "Brimoh enforcements are being sent in

from Bandung," he said, referring to units of the paramilitary Mobile Brigade based in the West Java province capital.

Bandung police chief Sergeant Dali Suhendra added some 200 Mobile Brigade officers had been sent to Pamanukan, some 100 kilometres east of here.

Residents of Bandung said they had not heard of any unrest there Friday but security had been increased, with police roadblocks sealing off some streets.

The violence began in Jatiwangi Thursday, when mobs damaged some 44 shops and homes, most owned by ethnic Chinese, and set fire to another 15. Eighteen people were arrested over that rampage. Police said hundreds of rioters angered by soaring prices continued their rampage Friday, attacking and

burning cars and businesses. Five people were arrested for looting after they attacked a roof-tile factory and set fire to six cars parked outside a nearby Coca-Cola factory, a police officer said by telephone from the town, some 160 kilometres east of Jakarta.

A car showroom was also destroyed when angry labourers and pedicab drivers resumed their rampage Friday morning, he added. All shops in the West Java province town were closed Friday in what one resident described as a "very heated" atmosphere.

"The situation now has calmed down, but after the Friday prayers it could happen again," police First Sergeant Sudirman said.

Shop-keepers, mostly ethnic-Chinese, had closed up their shops and were probably taking shelter with relatives, he added.



Shops and houses lay damaged after rioting in Majalengka, West Java (Reuters photo)

Bad weather, shortages bog down Afghan quake relief efforts

ROSTAQ, Afghanistan (AFP) — Relief efforts in quake-hit northern Afghanistan were bogged down Friday by dwindling supplies, shortages of vehicles and of manpower and by dense fog and cold weather.

Aid workers attempted to reach nearby villages to distribute relief goods to survivors but the lack of passable roads as well as vehicles hampered efforts to reach further isolated areas.

Less than 20 aid workers with about 10 off-road vehicles have been distributing relief supplies to thousands made homeless by a earthquake which rocked Takhar province on Feb. 4, killing about 4,500 people.

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) appealed for more assistance saying 30,000 Afghans were in desperate need of emergency help, as its first aid convoy carrying 20 tonnes of food reached the area.

An appeal for \$2.5 million for the aid operation was to be launched in Geneva later Friday. Poor weather has hampered relief operations as the extreme cold threatened to claim more lives in quake-hit Takhar province.

"Again we are at the mercy of the weather and our options are limited," Alex Saite, coordinator for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), told AFP.

The United Nations and the ICRC had hoped to begin Friday the aid drop of 1,000 tonnes of supplies into Rostaq.

"We were planning air-

drops and that cannot happen today," Mr. Saite said, adding that they hoped supplies from ICRC trucks currently on the way would arrive soon.

U.N. officials in Islamabad said no relief flight could be sent Friday because of bad weather.

"We desperately need aircraft" for the massive operation to parachute urgently needed relief materials to remote inaccessible mountain hamlets, a U.N. official said in the Pakistan capital.

Red Cross Federation spokesman Jaile Thorgersen said here that aid drops would still be considered in the next few days.

"The appalling weather and the low visibility make an air drop impossible but it will still be an option for the next few days if the weather improves," Mr. Thorgersen said.

"For now we have to make do with the tiny supplies we have," he added.

A truck convoy from the United Nations and the British aid group MERLIN arrived late Thursday from neighbouring Badakhshan province in far northeastern Afghanistan, carrying wheat, biscuits, medical supplies and blankets.

The WFP has around 15,000 tonnes of food available in Tajikistan and Afghanistan for the quake victims, and three truck convoys reached Rostaq Thursday.

A second convoy with 50,000 tonnes of food from Faizabad in northeastern Badakhshan province was expected in Rostaq Saturday, WFP officials said in Islamabad.

One U.N. truck arrived with shelter materials but a truck carrying coal from the French aid agency ACTED expected Friday morning had not yet reached Rostaq.

Snow which fell Wednesday and melted Thursday turning roads into a quagmire, burying them under about 60 centimetres of mud.

Emergency teams on the ground said their greatest concerns were the cold, the threat from communicable disease and dwindling food supplies, warning that more people could die.

"I've received reports that in the last two days there have been 26 deaths from cold-related causes," said Drew Gilmour of the British aid group MERLIN in Rostaq.

Fears also remain about conditions in outlying villages hit by the quake, most of which have not yet been reached by aid workers and have received no assistance.

Only eight out of 27 villages have been visited and assessed while conditions in the rest of quake-hit areas remain unknown. Hundreds of displaced people on donkeys carrying meagre possessions continued to stream into Rostaq, the nearest town from the epicentre of the quake which measured 5.6 on the Richter scale.

At least 6,000 refugees have trekked from their devastated villages to Rostaq, and are being housed in schools and military garrisons. Many of the buildings have no windows, and the refugees are struggling to keep warm, aid workers said.



International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia chief prosecutor Louise Arbour gestures during a news conference in Belgrade. Yugoslavia has refused to hand over three former Yugoslav army officers indicted for war crimes in the Croatian town of Vukovar in the autumn of 1991 saying its constitution barred extradition to foreign countries (Reuter photo)

Arbour praises Montenegrin prosecutor, calls for more cooperation

PODGORICA, Yugoslavia (AFP) — Chief U.N. war crimes prosecutor Louise Arbour praised Montenegro for its cooperation with the Hague tribunal Thursday, but called for the immediate surrender of suspects for trial.

"I welcome the openness of the state prosecutor (Vladimir Susovic) here and his willingness to cooperate fully with my office," Ms. Arbour, chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY), told reporters here.

Mr. Susovic offered "extensive information on the present situation of national prosecution" regarding war crimes issues in Montenegro, Ms. Arbour said.

"The international community is very interested not only to support the ICTY, but also to encourage fair national prosecution regarding war crimes issues," she added.

She praised the "wide exchange of mutual interests" between her team and the Montenegrin state prosecutor.

However, Ms. Arbour said that she "urged the government officials to support my efforts to solve immediate troubles connected with the transfer of those indicted to the Hague Tribunal."

Officials of Federal Yugoslavia, which now groups Serbia and Montenegro, say that the country's constitution bars it from extraditing suspects for trial before the ICTY.

But Ms. Arbour said that the ICTY "has supremacy over the national courts for crimes in its jurisdiction."

The pro-Western

Montenegrin leadership, headed by reformist President Milo Djukanovic, backs full cooperation with international justice and prosecutor Susovic visited the ICTY last May.

Montenegro confirmed the need for full cooperation with the tribunal, "a government statement said after a meeting between Ms. Arbour and Prime Minister Filip Vujanovic."

"The most serious difficulty that I have in this country, in fully executing the mandate that was given to me, is the issue of surrender and transfer of those indicted, who are believed to reside on the territory of Yugoslavia," Ms. Arbour said.

She added that, according to her information, "none of these indicted lives in Montenegro, but fulfilling the obligation of Yugoslavia is in the interests of all people" in the country.

Three former Yugoslav army officers were indicted in November 1995 over alleged offences in Croatia in 1991 at the start of the war in the former Yugoslav republics. They are believed to be resident in Yugoslavia.

Earlier this week in Belgrade, Ms. Arbour suggested the Yugoslav government should change any laws that bar it from extraditing suspects for trial at the ICTY.

Belgrade is signatory to the 1995 Dayton Peace accords under which it agreed to turn in war crimes suspects.

Both Croatia and Bosnia's Muslim-Croat Federation have cooperated with the tribunal, surrendering some suspects. Yugoslavia is considered the most recalcitrant.

Aide denies past affair with Clinton, calls reports flat lies

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The Pentagon's protocol chief denied Thursday she had an intimate or improper relationship with President Bill Clinton, calling news reports to the contrary "flat lies."

Rohyn Dickey's denial followed a report in The Daily Telegraph of London that she was abruptly transferred from the White House after being named as a former Mr. Clinton's lover in a court deposition.

"I have never had an intimate or inappropriate relationship with Bill Clinton," she said. "News stories stating that I had such a relationship are flat lies."

"Had any reporter called me prior to publication, I would have told him that this rumour is recklessly false and malicious," she said in a statement.

Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon took the unusual step of issuing a statement cautioning news organisations to "be very careful about picking up and reprinting potentially libellous reports from a London tabloid or the Internet."

The report outraged the White House, which warned reporters against chasing "a story that is very clearly way out of bounds," and said the dates of Ms. Dickey's employment changes refuted the charges.

The Daily Telegraph said Ms. Dickey, the former White House director of

special projects, was appointed to the Pentagon post last November, days after she was mentioned in a deposition in the Paula Jones sexual harassment lawsuit against Mr. Clinton.

The newspaper quoted sources familiar with the case as saying former Arkansas state trooper, Douglas Brown, testified to Mrs. Jones's lawyers on Nov. 13, 1997, that Mr. Clinton had a sexual relationship with Ms. Dickey during the 1980s.

The White House said Ms. Dickey actually accepted the Pentagon post on Oct. 9, well before the deposition. Mr. Bacon said she was first interviewed for the protocol job Aug. 7 and that the decision to hire her was "made months before the deposition cited in the false and ludicrous article."

"Secretary Cohen's office received no pressure of any kind to hire Rohyn," Mr. Bacon said. "In fact, we pursued her after rejecting two other White House candidates."

The Telegraph said Mr. Clinton's lawyer, Robert Bennett, was present at Mr. Brown's deposition and four days later Ms. Dickey was transferred to the Pentagon, the newspaper said.

Mr. Brown has previously told the American Spectator magazine that he had solicited more than 100 women for Mr. Clinton when the latter was gover-

nor of Arkansas, with mixed success.

Ms. Dickey, a 50-year-old divorcee, was previously administrator of Mr. Clinton's mansion in Little Rock in the mid-1980s, handled finance for his presidential campaign in 1992, and went to Washington after his inauguration, the report said.

The Brown deposition was taken by attorneys for Paula Jones who accuses Mr. Clinton of sexually harassing her when he was Arkansas governor and she a state employee in 1991.

The snowballing scandal over former White House intern Monica Lewinsky also emerged from a deposition to the Jones case, as have a number of reports on Mr. Clinton's sex life that his aides are scrambling to control.

Thursday's Telegraph story drew an unusual outburst from Mr. Clinton spokesman Michael McCurry, who initially refused to comment on the report.

"Any legitimate journalist can take about 10 minutes and satisfy themselves that this is not a story worth pursuing," he said, describing the author Ambrose Evans Pritchard as a "fiction writer."

Pritchard has written on a number of conspiracy theories on topics such as the suicide of former Clinton aide Vince Foster.

Farrakhan calls for Islamic unity in Jakarta

JAKARTA (AFP) — Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan Friday called for unity between Indonesian Muslims and his followers, while a row raged over his impending visit to Australia.

"I am proud to be in Indonesia, the largest Muslim nation in the world," he told reporters after meeting local Islamic leaders in Jakarta.

"I appeal to the Muslim 'ummah' (followers) — we must unite as Allah said in the Koran."

The American minister said his visit to Indonesia on the tail-end of a world tour was his own initiative, adding he sympathised with the country's current economic turmoil and believed it would "come through this trial."

With riots occurring in

several areas of the country over soaring prices and shortages of basic goods, Mr. Farrakhan urged Indonesian Muslims to demonstrate the restraint they had shown by fasting during the Islamic month of Ramadan.

Mr. Farrakhan arrived here on a private jet from Manila Thursday with a party of 21 and is scheduled to depart for Australia Saturday.

Criticism of his Australian visit intensified Friday as the country prepared for his arrival.

Mr. Farrakhan, who has often drawn criticism for his fiery oratory peppered with anti-Semitic references and digs at the white race, was issued a six-day visa by Australia this week after pledging not to incite racial hatred.

Artefacts unearthed at ancient Greek brothel

ATHENS (R) — Greek archaeologists appear to have found evidence that prostitution is truly among the world's oldest professions, unearthing what they believe is a 2,000-year-old brothel in the northern city of Salonika.

Among the artefacts found so far are a clay phallus with a moveable section and a glass jar depicting Aphrodite, the ancient Greek goddess of love, the daily Athens News reported Friday.

The building, dating to early Roman times, appears to have been a tavern linked to a bath complex with 25 separate pools arranged in a circle around water-heating facilities, the newspaper said.

A similar building has been uncovered in Turkey.

Little galaxy crashing into ours, astronomers say

PHILADELPHIA (R) — A surprisingly sturdy little galaxy is barging right into the earth's own Milky Way but it will probably be sucked in rather than cause any damage, astronomers said Friday.

The little galaxy, known as the Sagittarius Dwarf Spheroidal galaxy, could help astronomers figure out the secret of "dark matter," which measurements show must make up about 90 per cent of the universe but which cannot be seen.

"It's close enough that you can study individual stars in it the same way that you study stars in our galaxy," Rosamary Wyse, an astronomer at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, said in a statement released ahead of her lecture at the American Association for the Advancement of Science annual meeting in Philadelphia.

The dwarf galaxy is one-tenth of the diameter of the Milky Way but weighs much less — about one one-thousandth. Nine such dwarf companion galaxies have been found.

"The other galaxies are far enough away that you don't

really think of them as invading your space," Ms. Wyse said. "You can more or less ignore them. But Sagittarius has come right in."

Ms. Wyse worked with a team of astronomers including Rodrigo Ithata from the European Southern Observatory in Chile, and Mike Irwin at the Royal Greenwich Observatory and Gerard Gilmore of the Institute of Astronomy in Britain. These three originally saw the Sagittarius Dwarf galaxy in 1994.

It was found by chance — there are so many stars out there that it is sometimes hard to see ones like those in the Sagittarius Dwarf which, for instance, can be barely discerned through one of the thickest parts of the Milky Way. "Unless you know it's there you can't find it," Ms. Wyse said.

But Ms. Wyse and the others have made new observations that show the galaxy must orbit our Milky Way every billion years. Gravity from the much larger and massive Milky Way should have started pulling it apart, but has not.

Ms. Wyse said this is due

to dark matter — matter that cannot be seen by conventional means but which makes its presence known by its effects on gravity, and on galaxies like the Sagittarius Dwarf.

"It's just got a lot of dark matter, so it's able to hold on to its stars," Ms. Wyse said.

Astronomers think much of the Milky Way was made by pulling in other, smaller galaxies. There is both a kind of halo around the Milky Way, and a bulge in the middle.

Ms. Wyse said her measurements indicated that only about 10 per cent of the stars in the halo come from galaxies such as Sagittarius, but she would like to know more.

Having this dwarf galaxy nearby might let astronomers have a close-up peek at what dark matter looks like.

Dark matter is key to the future of the universe. How much matter there is will determine if the big bang that started it all will end in a big crunch, or a never-ending expansion. Until scientists find away to measure dark matter, they will not know for sure.

Sinn Fein might be shut out from talks

BELFAST (R) — Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), faced possible expulsion from Northern Ireland peace talks Friday after police said the IRA was involved in two murders in the province this week.

Sinn Fein Chairman Michael McLaughlin said the organisation would vigorously resist exclusion from the multi-party peace talks, and warned such a move could irreparably damage the peace process.

"They (the talks) cannot succeed without Sinn Fein," he said on Sky television.

Under the terms of peace talks, which involve the British and Irish governments and eight Protestant and Catholic parties, any party which has a guerrilla wing actively engaged in violence can be expelled.

The IRA claims it is still operating the ceasefire it proclaimed last July in its war against British rule in Northern Ireland.

But Mo Mowlam, Britain's minister for the province, said in a statement that the region's police chief, Ronnie Flanagan, had told her he thought the IRA was linked to the murders of Brendan Campbell and Robert Dougan who were shot dead in Belfast Monday and Tuesday.

"The chief constable (Flanagan) has given me a full briefing on the murders of Mr. Campbell and Mr. Dougan, along with his assessment that the IRA were involved in these murders," Ms. Mowlam said.

"This will now have to be considered very carefully with the Irish government and the other parties in accordance with the proper procedures," she added.

"The integrity of the talks process and the commitment to exclusively peaceful means are paramount and all parties must be treated fairly and equally," Ms. Mowlam said.

More violence was reported in the province Friday. Police said a 19-year-old man had been brought to hospital with arm and leg wounds he suffered in a paramilitary-style shooting Thursday night, but gave no further details.

Campbell, one of the two murder victims this week, was a suspected drug dealer shot on a busy street late Monday. Dougan was a well-known "loyalist" supporter of continued British rule.

He was shot in his parked car Tuesday.

The IRA, in an apparent bid to rebut claims by pro-British Protestant groups in the province who had publicly blamed it for the two murders, issued a statement in Dublin Thursday saying its trace was still intact.

Sinn Fein Chairman Michael McLaughlin Friday told the BBC Friday: "I wouldn't jump to conclusions about Sinn Fein being ejected from the talks" when they resume Monday in Belfast.

"We will not accept a suspension," Mr. McLaughlin said. "We will vigorously defend our right to be there."

"If Sinn Fein were excluded, we would argue that the integrity of the peace process would have been damaged, and maybe irreparably damaged," Mr. McLaughlin said.

Protestant "Unionist" politicians have clamoured for Sinn Fein to be thrown out of the peace talks, just as the pro-British Ulster Democratic Party (UDP) was excluded last month after its paramilitary arm admitted killing three Catholics.

However, British officials said this week that the UDP would be admitted to the talks again before the end of this month. David Adams, a UDP negotiator, said he expected this to happen within days.

He also said he expected Sinn Fein to be expelled from the talks. "We take no delight whatsoever in anyone else finding themselves in the position that we were in," Mr. Adams said.

"It's in no one's interest for any party to be driven away from this process," he said. "But we can't have a situation either where negotiations seem to operate on double standards."



Australia's prime minister John Howard (centre) sits between Monarchists Kerry Jones (left) and Lloyd Waddy at the constitutional convention in Canberra (Reuters photo)

All not roses for potential Kohl challenger Gerhard Schroeder

OSNABRUECK, Germany (AFP) — Gerhard Schroeder, the man polls describe as the most popular politician in Germany, was having difficulty whipping up the crowd at a Social Democrat (SPD) rally this week in the northern town of Osnabrueck.

The some 1,000 party faithful, almost all union officials, weren't quite sure what to make of Mr. Schroeder's centrist message, as when he drove home the point: "It is 100 times better to finance work (that creates jobs) rather than (pay) unemployment benefits."

Mr. Schroeder, 53, an elegant figure with his left hand in his pocket and his right chopping the air like a Kennedy, won a standing ovation at the end of his speech, in a campaign for the Lower Saxony state parliament that has become almost a referendum on Mr. Schroeder as a possible SPD candidate.

Oliver Schuff, a 29-year-old in the audience, explained that while the crowd would rather have been listening to SPD national chief Oskar Lafontaine, a traditional leftist who thinks companies should think about worker welfare before making business decisions, they realised that Mr. Schroeder is the "one who can do better in elections" for them.

Mr. Schroeder feels he will win his bet of doing well enough in Lower Saxony elections March 1 to prove his popularity and thus become unstoppable for getting the SPD nomination to run against conservative Chancellor Helmut Kohl in general elections in September.

But the lack of enthusiasm in Osnabrueck reflected a division in the SPD that could leave Mr. Lafontaine with the nomination, especially if Mr. Schroeder fails to improve on his score of 44.3 per cent in the last state parliamentary elections in 1994.

The Sueddeutsche Zeitung newspaper reported Thursday on an internal SPD memo that said clearly that Mr. Lafontaine should be the candidate, regardless of the result in Lower Saxony. The paper by SPD environmentalist Michael Muller attacked Mr. Schroeder's centrist message and his "personalising the election and changing (positions) to win votes."

Mr. Lafontaine was soundly beaten by Mr. Kohl in legislative elections in 1990 but his classic socialist message, stressing help for the unemployed, has wider support within the party than Mr. Schroeder's pro-business platform, especially since unemployment is running at record levels in Germany.

Meanwhile, Mr. Schroeder's main challenger in Lower Saxony, Christian Wulff, 38, of Mr. Kohl's Christian Democratic Union (CDU), may not be as easy to defeat as in 1994, when the CDU took only 36.4 per cent of the vote for the state parliament.

Mr. Wulff was young then, only 34, and has since "done pretty well as CDU chief" for Lower Saxony, said Matthias Koch, political editor of the Hannover Allgemeine newspaper.

Mr. Kohl, 67, is making 10 campaign appearances in four weeks to help Mr. Wulff and kicked off the CDU campaign Jan. 24 in Hanover by

saying the state vote would be crucial in Germans choosing how they will live in the 21st century.

Mr. Kohl's austere politicking was a sharp contrast to Mr. Schroeder's who had opened his campaign a week earlier to a crowd of some 10,000 gathered in three connecting tents in Hanover, with a circus motif built around the themes of technology and modernity which Mr. Schroeder champions.

Mr. Wulff insisted in a talk with reporters Wednesday that he has a message to deliver the Schroeder charm.

"Lower Saxony had success in the first years of reunification (of Germany in 1990) but now things have gone bad," he said pointing to 14 per cent unemployment in the state, far above the average of some nine per cent in the rest of western Germany.

Mr. Wulff attacked what he called the "egotistical" use Mr. Schroeder is making of the campaign. Mr. Schroeder has said that if he scores within two percentage points of the SPD results of 1994 in the state, then he will have proved his worth and should be automatically given the SPD nomination for chancellor.

Mr. Wulff may be doomed however since the CDU allies, the Free Democrats, are unlikely to get the five per cent of the vote needed to win representation in the state parliament.

Mr. Koch said Mr. Schroeder's power is that he is able to "reach out to conservative voters as well as the SPD. Mr. Lafontaine can't do that. The unions back Mr. Schroeder because there is no alternative (on the left)."

French police examine Fiat Uno in Diana crash probe

PARIS (R) — French police said Friday they are examining a damaged white Fiat Uno which could be linked to the Paris crash that killed Britain's Princess Diana.

Lawyers for Harrods Department Store owner Mohamed Fayed had asked investigating Judge Hervé Stephan to examine a car they found at a Paris garage, a police official said.

"We are in the process of looking at it. We do not yet have a result," the official told Reuters.

He said police knew who the car belonged to but declined to give further details.

Lawyer Georges Kiejman, who represents the Fayed family in connection with the French crash investigation, was unavailable for comment, an assistant at his Paris law offices said.

French investigators have been looking for months for a mysterious white Fiat Uno they believe is linked to Diana's fatal Aug. 31 car crash in Paris. They have checked out thousands of

the cars in the Paris area. The investigators believe that the Mercedes in which she was killed along with companion Dodi Fayed — Mohamed Fayed's son — and driver Henri Paul, grazed the Fiat just before crashing at high speed into the concrete pillar of a Paris road tunnel.

Witnesses reported seeing a white car zigzagging out of the tunnel at the time of the late night crash, and bits of paint and shards of glass found at the accident scene have been identified as probably coming from a Fiat Uno. The daily Telegraph said in London that lawyers hired by the wealthy Fayed had traced the Fiat to a garage near the French capital. They said the wing of the car had been repainted.

Police want to question the owner to determine what role if any it played in the fatal crash.

It may simply have been in the wrong place at the wrong time.

But the owner's identity could prove important if it turned out to be a paparazzi photographer.

'Don't get married, you'll have less sex'

DUBLIN (R) — On the eve of St. Valentine's day, think twice before you take to one knee and ask for the hand of your beloved — marriage means less sex.

A survey by condom makers Durex found married couples had sex on average 40 times less per year than couples who lived together, Irish daily the Examiner reported Friday.

The survey also found that exchanging wedding vows would knock a whole nine minutes off the average time spent making love. Married couples get it over and done with in 16 minutes that while cohabiting couples spent 25 minutes in the act.

Married couples still found the energy to make love 135 times a year on average. "Only 23 per cent said they would like to have more sex, while 39 per cent of those cohabiting complained they were still not getting enough," the survey said.

Roars of approval for an Australian republic

CANBERRA (AFP) — A vote in support of an Australian republic met with roars of approval from a packed public gallery at Old Parliament House Friday, as more than a million television viewers tuned in to watch the historic moment.

Thousands of enthusiasts queued for hours for a brief glimpse of the antics on the floor of the tiny chamber where delegates have spent the past two weeks chafing Australia's future.

But outside the nation's capital, public response to the sometimes riotous proceedings at the constitutional convention was more muted.

"Why waste Australian dollars 40 million (\$27 million). Do away with the governor general and call the prime minister president, or is this too simple," a letter to Sydney's Daily Telegraph said Friday.

"Why do politicians treat us as children? Give us a say," said another, after a vote where the convention backed the election of a president by a majority vote in parliament.

However, those who waited hours for a 15-minute spell in the public gallery were more enthusiastic about the 89-52 vote in favour of cutting ties with the British monarchy.

"This is history in the making," 71-year-old Joan Kersey said. "This is about going into the next century

a proud and new independent nation. We have to break away once and for all from our colonial past."

Australia's national broadcaster has screened the debate live for four hours a day, with exhaustive analysis in its evening news and current affairs programmes.

Australian Broadcasting Corporation spokeswoman

Pam Howe told AFP that in this nation of 18 million, a million people a day had tuned in to watch the coverage, with many more expected during the crucial final sessions.

They were entertained by a generally informal debate which was at times rowdy, abusive and hilarious.

Among the 152 delegates were former prime minis-

ters, entertainers, celebrities and a contingent of perennial mavericks such as monarchist Bruce Ruxton, who once called for pioneering republicans to be tried for treason.

The Adelaide Advertiser said in its Friday editorial that the convention had been a curious lesson in democracy.

"For the past (two weeks) we have had this expensive circus, with clowns, like all circuses, resulting in bringing closer the only voice that matters — the absolute verdict of the people," it said. Debate was dominated by in-fighting between republicans who eventually thrashed out a compromise model which the delegates approved Thursday.

Bystanders likened the proceedings to a blood-sport between republicans, with the monarchists cheering on. "When you put two republican dogs in a room you come out with a mongrel," said monarchist delegate Sophie Panopoulos on the hybrid model.

Newspaper editorials were more positive about the outcome, with the Sydney Morning Herald saying it was cumbersome but not unworkable.

"The fact that a broad coalition... have come together behind the unity model augurs well for its chances of winning enough popular support to pass at a referendum," it said.

Australian to face referendum on republic

CANBERRA (AFP) — Prime Minister John Howard indicated Friday that he will call a referendum to decide if Australia should become a republic after a constitutional convention overwhelmingly backed a blueprint for one.

Delegates voted by 75 to 57 in favour of a plan that would see a president elected by parliament after widespread community consultation, and voted against continuing links to the British throne.

Another 22 republicans who had supported the direct election of a future president abstained while 10 others did not vote at all.

Although support for the blueprint fell four votes short of an absolute majority of the delegates Mr. Howard said it was enough. Delegates had earlier voted by 89 to 52 for a republic in principle.

Mr. Howard, a monarchist, had last week promised to call a referendum if clear majority support emerged for a particular model.

He told the delegates the only commonsense interpretation of the outcome was that a majority — 89 out of 152 — had voted for a republic, and that amongst the republican models, the one with 73 votes was clearly preferred.

"Now when you bind those two together it would be a travesty to common sense terms for Australian democracy for that proposition not to be put to the Australian people."

Mr. Howard also asked that the final vote of the 10-day constitutional convention, on a resolution recommending that he call a referendum, be held as quickly as possible. But he made clear what his decision would be.

India heads for polls, Hindu nationalists seen leading

NEW DELHI (AFP) — India, the world's largest democracy, gets set to go to the polls next week as calls gathered pace Friday for a joint effort to stop Hindu nationalists from coming to power.

The nationalists, accused of being sectarian by their rivals, are tipped to top the staggered polls but fall short of a majority.

That has sparked speculation that the Congress party, rejuvenated by a campaign by Sonia Gandhi, widow of assassinated former Premier Rajiv Gandhi, could revive its alliance with the outgoing coalition government and thwart the nationalists.

Around 600 million voters are eligible to vote during the four-phased balloting on Feb. 16, 22, 28 and March 7.

The results are expected to emerge in the first week of March.

An opinion poll published Friday in The Times of India newspaper, duplicating earlier surveys, said it was "clear that the country is headed for another hung parliament."

The poll forecast that the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) and its allies, while making major gains, would fall short of a majority by more than 20 seats, winning around 249 of the 545 Lower-House seats.

That would leave the way open for Sonia Gandhi's Congress and the outgoing multi-party United Front minority coalition, who both see the nationalists as a threat to India's secular constitution, to launch a new



Lal Krishan Advani, president of the right-wing Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party gestures during a news conference in New Delhi (Reuters photo)

partnership.

An uneasy 18-month alliance between the two collapsed in November.

The United Front's Socialist Party Friday suggested a new anti-BJP alliance could emerge if voting produces a hung parliament.

A party spokesman said: "In order to defeat the BJP, we can seek or extend support to the Congress. The Congress is one thousand times better than BJP."

The BJP, which plans to

build nuclear weapons and impose limits on foreign investments, and around a dozen allies say they are still confident of winning a majority and forming their first stable government.

They warn a hung parliament will lead to further instability in a country about to elect its fifth government within two years.

But those hopes were dealt a blow when the chief priest of India's largest mosque Friday appealed to Muslims to vote against the

Hindu nationalists. Abdullah Bukhari, while attacking all the main parties for their treatment of the country's 125 million Muslims, argued people should support "a government which may hold firmly the democratic system and secular values."

The nationalists have been making a concerted effort to woo Muslims, India's largest minority who make up around 13 per cent of the population, for the first time.

Their slogan of "one nation, one people, one culture", however, has sown fear of discrimination among other religious and ethnic communities.

The Congress, India's oldest party, had looked sure of a heavy defeat in the polls until it persuaded Italian-born Sonia Gandhi last month to act as its campaign figurehead.

Despite her political inexperience and her decision not to stand as a candidate, she has drawn mammoth crowds and revived party morale. She was due to address a mass rally in the capital later Friday.

Hundreds of thousands of police and paramilitary personnel will be deployed across India's 900,000 polling stations during the next four weeks.

The election commission's hopes of trouble-free elections, however, have been shaken in recent days by around 25 election-related killings in Kashmir and India's north-east, both plagued by armed separatist rebellions.

U.N. concerned over civilian hardships in Sierra Leone

NEW YORK (AFP) — The United Nations said it is alarmed over civilian casualties of the conflict in Sierra Leone and has called on all parties involved to help humanitarian groups reach stranded people.

"I am increasingly alarmed by the humanitarian crisis in Sierra Leone which has intensified to recent days," said U.N. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Sergio Vieira

de Mello.

"The conflict has led to an increasing number of civilian casualties and growing population displacement," he said in a statement issued late Thursday.

He also expressed deep concern for welfare of civilian and humanitarian workers, particularly in Freetown. Mr. Vieira de Mello reiterated U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan's call for all those involved in the fighting to "ensure the safety of all

civilians, to facilitate access by humanitarian organisations throughout the country and to guarantee the security of their personnel."

Mr. Vieira de Mello said U.N. agencies, non-governmental organisations and international groups were "ready to respond to meet the needs of all affected populations."

The Nigerian troops said Thursday they ousted Sierra Leone's nine-month-old military junta after seizing control of the capital

Freetown at the end of a week of heavy fighting.

It is estimated that more than half a million people trapped in Freetown were running out of food and medicine.

No reliable casualty figures were available for the clashes, which broke out a week ago when both sides in the conflict accused the other of provocation. But at least 100 people are known to have been killed, including 50 who drowned while trying to flee.

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Signpost for difficult times

THE IMMEDIATE result of the authorities' decision to break up yesterday's demonstration at Al Hussein Mosque is that Amman was not going to be the first Arab capital to witness a rally in support of the Iraqi regime. The message is clear: Jordan is not ready for an experience similar to that of 1990-1991 when public support, expressed in so many demonstrations and rallies at the time, only backfired against ourselves and Iraq.

If the government was certain that yesterday's rally would only express support for and sympathy with the Iraqi people, it might have asked directly for the objective to be attained through other means or even given the organisers the go-ahead. But all probabilities were that the demonstration would have turned into a show of backing for Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. If that happened, the authorities probably thought the purpose would have been not only self-defeating, but the cause of the country as a whole will have also been ill-served.

The Iraqi regime, in its standoff with the Americans and members of the U.N. Security Council, is betting mainly on popular support in the Arab World. While backing for that regime has eroded over the past seven years, sympathy with the people of Iraq has remained steady if it has not actually increased. Unfortunately the leaders of the opposition chose, maybe deliberately, to mix the two. By triggering a popular movement in support of a confused cause, they could play in the hands of the wrong people as well. That would be in the disinterest of Jordan, which cannot afford to displease the world community, the Arabs and the Iraqi people themselves.

We understand that the opposition, and most of the Arab masses, are most unhappy, indeed angry, with the U.S.' double standards in dealing with various issues in the Middle East and the Gulf and with attempts to weaken the Arab Nation. But support for policies of the Iraqi regime cannot be our saviour. To begin with, it is not the right thing to challenge anyone, let alone a superpower with major allies, with a fragmented and weak nation, particularly over such an issue as providing access to U.N. inspection teams.

We are strongly for the right of people to express themselves in an orderly and peaceful way. And we strongly oppose the use of force to deny them that right. Yet we recognise that tempers are high and irrationality will not serve our causes.

In any and all cases, a formula could and should be found to satisfy both the people's wish to express themselves and the government's desire to maintain security and tranquillity in difficult times.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Samir Qatani said the U.S. has claimed it would direct its attack on sites which contain chemical and other weapons of mass destruction, but such and attack can only cause great danger to the Iraqi people and the countries around Iraq as well because the whole atmosphere will be contaminated. U.N. laws ban any attack on a site suspected to be containing such weapons for fear that the danger will spread to the civilian population, according to the writer. But the fact is that the U.S. realises that Iraq no longer possesses any weapons of mass destruction and its plans to attack are designed to devastate the Iraqi nation and dominate the whole Arab World and its oil wealth, Dr. Qatani said. He asked, now that Iraq has announced its acceptance of the U.S. demand that the presidential palaces be inspected, why is Washington threatening to wage war on Iraq? If the U.S. and the Western nations claim that they defend human rights, why are they threatening to annihilate the civilian population of Iraq, he also asked. He said, even if Iraq allowed the inspectors to search every inch of Iraq the U.S. would not lift the sanctions unless it secured full control over the country's oil wealth.

Al Dustour's Nawaf Zaru criticised the Arab and the Islamic countries, in particular Syria and Iran, for their present stand vis-a-vis the Iraqi crisis. Both Syria and Iran realise all too well that they are themselves targeted by Turkey and Israel which are backed by the U.S., and sooner or later their turn will come and they too will face aggression and possible disintegration, Zaru said. The writer said, when the aggressors are finished with Iraq they will turn to Syria and Iran which now maintain hostility towards Baghdad and the Iraqi people; and therefore they ought to take a very positive stand by deed rather than word in defence of the Iraqi nation. It is painful to see Iran preventing a Russian plane carrying parliament members with relief supplies from flying to Iraq, and it is painful to see Syria only paying lip service to Iraq, he said. It is in the interest of both Tehran and Damascus to take the lead and end the sanctions on Iraq and declare that they will confront any aggression on the Arab nation, the writer added. Zaru said Syria and Iran should stand in the forefront, exposing the American acts of terrorism and rallying the Arab and Islamic nations against the aggressors.

Jordanian Perspective

Calls for diplomatic solution fall on deaf ears

ACCORDING TO Mohammed Hassanein Heikal, the top Arab analyst and thinker, it is dead certain that the U.S. and Britain, and some of their allies are indeed going to put up a show of force with regard to the United Nations Security Council resolutions by launching a military strike against Iraq. And all indications are the action could come sooner than expected if only because of Washington's anxiety to get it over with before Arab and Muslim as well as international opposition reaches a crescendo.

We don't know what shape and form the strike will assume, but it is a safe bet that some of the presidential palaces and "sovereign" sites in Iraq are going to be the target. Still, it is unlikely that the U.S. would sustain a prolonged bombing campaign and aim at eliminating Iraqi President Saddam Hussein because there is no sign that Washington is ready to deal with a chaotic Iraq. Definitely the U.S. would like to have a controlled transition in Iraq, but only if American intelligence could pull all the strings in the situation. Until then, the looming conflict with Iraq is going to be a cat-and-mouse game, which might produce a much stronger Saddam, who would enjoy this time, just like Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt before, the support of more Arab masses being the only leader who addressed the inherent Islamic psyche which grants immediate heroic glorification for those who could defy and survive even if beaten.

However, the forthcoming action against Iraq is not going to be limited to lobbing a few Tomahawks at Baghdad. The firepower that the U.S. had already gathered in the region four weeks ago was more than enough for such an action and truncate all other obstacles. But the might and size of the array of hi-tech weaponry the U.S. is assembling in the Gulf, and its binary effect leave no room for doubt that the strike against Iraq would be much more than a pinprick of a dozen or two missiles (After all Iraq sustained more than 110,000 tonnes of explosives during the 40 days of "war" in 1991. So what difference would it make for Iraq to have another volley of explo-

sives targeted at it? Perhaps that is the reason the U.S. has taken its own time in this episode of repeat action against Iraq.

The American military commander in the Gulf, Gen. Anthony Zinni, who impressed us during his visit to Amman, as being highly rational and objective, hit the nail on the head when he said Wednesday that U.S. forces would be ready to strike in one week's time.

That is U.S. military talk, a military which has received clear orders where to hit in Iraq and what targets to take out. However, there is of course room left for diplomacy to preempt that action if only the politics would allow it. But it is unlikely that Washington could be persuaded in that direction since its course reflects a determination to punish Iraq no matter what.

According to many analysts, American arm-twisting, first by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and then by Secretary of Defence William Cohen, produced last week's statement by the Gulf Cooperation Council calling on Iraq to comply with U.N. Security Council resolutions or face the consequences of defiance.

The same call was repeated by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Abdullah who both feel they lost their regional roles as the key players in the Middle East to Israel. Washington did not fool anyone when it asserted that it had an "across-the-board" support from the Arab World for whatever action it intended to take against Iraq. Both Albright and Cohen were not seeking Arab support for military action against Iraq but were trying to cut down the mounting Arab and Muslim opposition to such a course of events.

The call, on every Muslim, by Al Azhar Imam, Sayyed Mohammed Tantawi, the supreme religious authority for Sunni Muslims, to defend Iraq in the event of an American military action should have sent jitters up the spines of Washington's strategists since that call is clearly indicative of the rising Arab and Muslim anger against the double-standard American policy vis-a-vis the Middle

East and the Third World in general.

But, instead of recognising the right message, the strategists opted to push the clock forward in their plans to destroy more of Iraq's infrastructure (there is little doubt that power stations, bridges, government buildings and communication facilities are going to be among the prime targets of the heavy American guns in the Gulf, as well as thousands of civilians killed being the "natural collateral" in addition to the suffering of the Iraqi people). Ignored in the bargain is the ongoing, in-depth and independent scrutiny of information provided by Iraq so far of its weapon programmes under an agreement reached between the United Nations Special Commission and the Iraqi government during UNSCOM chief Richard Butler's last visit to Baghdad. The U.S. is completely ignoring that Baghdad seems confident that the three separate teams of independent experts — chemical, biological and missiles — would establish the accuracy and completeness of the information it has provided so far. Obviously, if an impartial and independent study of the data is conducted, then there is no need for UNSCOM to demand access to "presidential/sovereign" sites in Iraq because there would not be anything left to look for, says the Iraqi argument.

Those discussions by independent experts are scheduled to end by early March, and their findings will be submitted to Butler, who has the final authority in determining the authenticity and soundness of the experts' reports. Of course it would take some time before definite conclusions are reached, but the question of whether or not the U.S. would wait has already been answered in the negative.

Obviously the temptation and opportunity to use Iraq for another round of punching is too attractive for the U.S. to let go while we in Jordan and Arabs elsewhere, as a senior statesman said this week, we can only watch in helplessness while the sole superpower sets its new rules for international conduct and violates them at will.

LETTERS

Appeal from Nagano

To the editor:

FROM ACROSS the borders, I find myself reaching for you to vent my sorrow and hoping that you can still publish some of our cries.

We have been watching and listening to the threats made by the leaders of the so-called "free world" against Iraq, and the pleas of so many others to find a diplomatic solution to the latest crisis between the U.S. and Iraq. However, nothing was more amazing and degrading than the request by Japan to avoid any strikes against Iraq during the "Winter Olympics" being held in Nagano. I'm sure the people of Japan are very proud of their government especially those who remember "Hiroshima" and "Nagasaki". I'm also sure the children of Iraq will appreciate this humanitarian gesture from the people of Japan and will have many words of thanks which may not be heard when the bombs start raining over Baghdad.

On behalf of the children of Iraq and all the world, we thank you Japan for the humanitarian gesture of the year, or maybe the century.

Emile Rihani
 Jeddah
 Saudi Arabia

The Jordan Times welcomes letters and contributions from its readers on any issue they wish to tackle. Letters intended for publication should contain the writer's full name and preferably address as well. Names can be withheld upon request but only under special circumstances. Letters are subject to editing and abridging.

U.S. threat to Iraq unjustified, spells danger for region, say commentaries

REVIEWED BY
 ELIA NASRALLAH

LOCAL ARABIC dailies last week centred commentaries on the Iraqi crisis and efforts to defuse it. They also discussed the faltering Middle East peace process and domestic affairs.

Fahed Faneek of Al Ra'i daily warned that a military aggression on Iraq can result in the disintegration of that country and chaos prevailing in the whole region. If the U.S. succeeds in toppling the Iraqi regime through force, Turkey can be expected to occupy northern Iraq, Iran could move to Iraq's southern regions, and Israel might be tempted to occupy the central regions of the Iraqi nation, he predicted. The writer added that, on the other hand, Saddam's regime might not collapse despite the attack and the whole region could remain in turmoil for a long time to come. Regardless of the results of the aggression, he said, security in the whole Arab region will be destabilised, and the U.S. which assumes the role of world police would not be able to control the ensuing situation.

Mahmoud Rimawi, a writer for Al Ra'i, considered U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan's decision to cancel his visit to Iraq and the Middle East region a bad omen, indicating that the military option is gaining the upper hand. He said that in light of this situation the Arab League should double its efforts at the international level and through the U.N. to prevent the U.S. from carrying out its aggression under the U.N. umbrella. The Arab League should move

to avert a devastating blow to the Arab nation's future, and the Arabs' national interests, said the writer. Referring to the stand of the other nations who oppose a military strike, the writer said the Arabs should transcend their present differences and back the French, Russian and Chinese stands and their initiative for a diplomatic solution.

According to Sultan Hattab of Al Ra'i, nothing in what Iraq does can satisfy Washington or open the way for the lifting of sanctions. The writer said even if the U.N. inspectors searched the presidential sites and other sensitive locations in Iraq, no one can guarantee that the U.S. would not demand something else from the Iraqis as a condition for lifting the sanctions. The Americans are assuming the role of the U.N., disregarding the views of other nations and are determined to impose their hegemony on the Gulf region for good and so they are bound to keep finding other excuses in order to retain the sanctions on Iraq to force it to succumb to their wishes and desires, charged the writer. The American leaders have said they do not want to topple Saddam Hussein through the military strike, Hattab said, adding that this means the presence of the present regime is useful as it gives the U.S. the perfect excuse to remain in the Gulf, imposing its hegemony on the whole Arab region and its oil wealth.

Iraq's acceptance of the U.S. demands that all the presidential palaces be searched by the U.N. inspectors should end the present tension and the American sabre-

rattling, according to Ibrahim Abisi, a writer for Al Ra'i daily. Abisi said Russia, France and the rest of the world are of the view that since Iraq has accepted the U.N. conditions for searching the sensitive sites, there should be no threats of the use of force. The U.S., he said, which has been sponsoring the Middle East peace process to prevent a war between the Arabs and Israel, should respond to the will of the world community and stop threatening Iraq and accept a peaceful solution in the Iraqi crisis as well. A peaceful solution, Abisi added, is far better than devastating a country causing the loss of life of innocent people. The writer said that since the seven years of sanctions and war on Iraq have not achieved any positive results for the U.S., the Americans should try their hand at peaceful means to restore stability

try. She said the seven years of sanctions have weakened Iraq and allowed the U.N. inspectors to destroy all the weapons of mass destruction found in the Iraqi regime's possession. It is clear to the world community, she said, that the Americans are after Saddam's regime and determined to prevent any Arab country to possess any capability of rising against U.S. and Israeli domination of the Arab region.

Taher Adwan, a writer for Al Arab Al Yawm, said the Arab League seems to have woken up after a long slumber and realised that something must be done to fend off danger posed to the Arab World. Though the Arab League's moves in reaction to the present Iraqi crisis came late, they are important in light of the looming danger and fear that Iraq might be partitioned by the hostile forces to the Arab Nation, said the writer. Adwan warned against further Arab countries' silence as to the looming danger saying that the Arabs must learn a lesson from what had happened in the 1991 Gulf war and should assume their responsibility in dealing with the crisis at a time when they see that Israel is continuing to scoff at the U.N. resolutions and bent on maintaining their occupation of Arab lands. The writer said the Arab League must see the present tension as a sign of a very bleak future for the nation if they fail to act promptly and effectively.

Israel is the sole beneficiary of the present Iraqi crisis as the situation gives the Jewish state a chance to continue to disregard U.N. resolutions and perpetuate

its occupation of Arab lands with backing from the U.S., the sponsor of the peace process, said Rashid Hassan of Al Aswaq. Israel sees the Iraqi crisis as an opportunity to make the world forget about its occupation of Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories and is making the most of it by proceeding with its settlement programmes and neglecting the Oslo accord with the Palestinians, according to the writer. He said Israel, backed by, world Zionism, is pressuring Clinton into launching an attack on Iraq so as to divert world public attention away from what is happening in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Mohammad Subeithi, a writer for Al Arab Al Yawm, criticised the secretary general of the newly formed Jordan Labour Party Mohammad Khataibeb for announcing that the party will be working towards normalisation with Israel. Khataibeb has also said there is nothing in Jordanian laws which prevents Israelis from purchasing lands and factories in Jordan and that nothing should stand in the way of organising popular Jordanian-Israeli meetings to bolster bilateral ties, said the writer. With such a statement, he said, the new party is thus stillborn because it is acting against the views and feelings of the majority of the Jordanian people. The writer said the party's ideas constitute an insult to the Jordanian society and national forces should stand firm in the face of this party which disregards the feelings of the Arab people, particularly the Palestinians and Jordanians.

THE WEEK IN PRINT

to the region. Al Dustour's Muna Shugair said the Americans have no excuse for carrying out an aggression on Iraq. In 1991 the U.S.-led coalition launched war on Iraq for the declared purpose of liberating Kuwait from Iraq's occupation, said the writer, but now Washington has no pretext except to achieve its own selfish objectives of devastating an Arab coun-

NRA continues field studies to prospect for oil, mineral resources

By Iyad Waqfi
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Natural Resources Authority (NRA) Director General Qaisi said Friday that NRA is proceeding with its field studies to prospect for oil and mineral resources throughout the Kingdom.

Mr. Qaisi said the NRA has signed oil prospecting agreements with a number of companies.

Under two agreements signed with U.S. companies, Anadarko will explore in the Safawi region and Nepton will prospect for oil in the eastern Sarhan region.

Trans Global, the third U.S. oil company, will drill at least two exploratory wells in the Dead Sea area, conduct seismological surveys in areas extending for 150 kilometres in length and conduct geological and geophysical studies at the cost of \$300,000.

Mr. Qaisi said that a Canadian firm, Canop, has signed an agreement with NRA to prospect for oil in the Jafar area and the northern parts of the Jordan Valley.

He added that an Algerian

company, Sontrac, will sign soon an agreement with the authority to prospect for oil in the Kingdom.

"In 1995, the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources awarded the National Oil Company (NOC) a 50-year concession to prospect for oil and natural gas in the Rishbeh area," said Mr. Qaisi.

He pointed out that the Rishbeh wells cover 15 per cent of the Kingdom's needs of gas.

According to the concession, NOC is allowed to conduct seismological and geophysical as well as aerial surveys in the course of its exploration.

Mr. Qaisi said that gold has been discovered in Wadi Musa region but "we are waiting for detailed exploration in order to conduct feasibility studies."

With regard to copper, Mr. Qaisi said: "We faced difficulties while prospecting for copper since it was discovered in Dana Wildlife Reserve."

He concluded that NRA is intending to explore for uranium in the middle areas of the Kingdom since "encouraging results have been achieved so far."

BIS says currency board systems carry heavy risks

BALI, Indonesia (AFP) — The Swiss-based Bank for International Settlements (BIS) Friday warned economies with free-floating currencies that they should be prepared to pay the cost of embracing currency peg arrangements.

Without naming Indonesia, BIS General Manager Andrew Crockett said governments should seek an exchange rate regime that avoided "this dilemma" unless they were prepared to accept the full rigour and logic of fixed rates.

Mr. Crockett issued the warning in a speech at a Southeast Asian central bankers' meeting in this beach resort.

Indonesia's plans to set up a currency board to manage a Hong Kong-style peg for the rupiah has triggered fresh market turmoil amid growing doubts over Indonesia's capacity to sustain such an arrangement.

Under such a system, the rupiah is expected to be pegged to the U.S. dollar at a fixed rate.

And unlike the current system, the rupiah in circulation should be fully covered by the country's foreign exchange reserves, which analysts say may be insufficient in Indonesia's case.

But the central bank Indonesia has said there was no need to fully match the issue of its rupiah currency with foreign exchange reserves, saying an "unorthodox" option would allow for less than full backing of reserves.

The BIS is called the "central banker's bank" and is influential in global monetary policy issues.

Mr. Crockett said it would be difficult to make changes in an exchange rate peg that had come to symbolise an overall macro-economic strategy.

Arab Gulf economies set to slow down in '98

ABU DHABI (AFP) — The economies of six Gulf Arab states are set to sharply slow down in 1998 although some of them boosted oil output and projected higher spending, economic experts said Wednesday.

After two years of galloping growth, the economies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) will increase by around 2.3 per cent in current prices this year while real growth could be much lower, they said.

The combined gross domestic product (GDP) of the 17-year-old political, defence and economic alliance is forecast to expand to around \$260.5 billion in 1998 from \$254.5 billion in 1997.

"The oil sector is expected to decline in the GCC this year because of a projected weakening in crude prices," said Henry Azzam, chief economist and assistant general manager at the Saudi National Commercial Bank.

"This will offset the increase in oil production and high growth rates in other sectors, especially in the private sector," he said in a study published in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) daily Al Khaleej.

A breakdown showed Saudi Arabia's GDP, by far the biggest in the Middle East, is projected to increase by around two per cent in 1998 compared with 7.1 per cent in 1997 and 8.6 per cent in 1996.

The UAE's economy will likely grow by 2.5 per cent compared with 4.4 per cent and 10.9 per cent in the previous two years. In Kuwait, growth in the GDP will slow down to around two per cent from 4.5 per cent and 16.8 per cent.

The economies of Oman and Bahrain will also be much slower, growing by nearly three per cent and two per cent respectively.

Qatar's GDP will record high growth of eight per cent but the level is way below the 17 per cent rate recorded in 1997 and 12 per cent in 1996.

Economists attributed the high rates in Qatar during those two years to strong crude prices, record oil production and the export of liquefied

natural gas from its giant North Field after the partial completion of LNG ventures.

"Oil prices are expected to be lower this year but the Gulf economies will likely record positive growth rates, although lower than the previous year," said Mohammed Al Asumi, chief economist at the Emirates Industrial Bank.

"This is due to the continuous expansion in the private sector and non-oil sectors, mainly light industry and services." Crude prices were as high as \$20 in 1996 and \$19 in 1997 as they were strengthened by higher global demand, tensions between the United States and Baghdad, the absence of sanctions-hit Iraq from the oil market for most of 1996, and compliance by major Gulf producers with output quotas assigned by the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

But prices this month tumbled by more than \$3 to one of their lowest levels in four years despite peak seasonal demand.

The slide was due to excess supplies by the 11-nation OPEC following its November agreement to hike its official output ceiling by 10 per cent to 27.5 million barrels per day (bpd). Other factors included Iraq's recent agreement with the United Nations to resume crude exports, the economic crisis in South-east Asia, and a mild winter in the northern hemisphere.

"GCC states should pursue plans to restructure their economies away from developments in the oil market," Mr. Azzam said.

"Any improvement in oil prices should not make them complacent and detract them from reform plans as this will reflect their non-credibility and send discouraging signals to the private sector."

The GCC groups Saudi Arabia, the world's dominant oil power, with Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain. The first three members snatched more than one million bpd of the increase in OPEC's ceiling for the first half of 1998.

Southeast Asia enjoys export boom amid financial gloom

SINGAPORE (AFP) — Southeast Asia's troubled economies are chalking up trade surpluses through cheaper exports from weaker currencies to cushion them from the debilitating effects of regional financial turmoil, analysts say.

"An export recovery is underway—nearly everywhere in the region in local currency terms and this is largely double-digit export growth both in nominal and real terms," said P. K. Basu, director of Regional Macro-Economic Research at Union Bank of Switzerland in Singapore.

Mr. Basu said the export growth could sharply turn around current account deficits prevalent among many of the economies embroiled in financial turmoil stemming from a rapid erosion of their currencies against the U.S. dollar.

Jimmy Koh, regional economist with London-

based financial house I.D.E.A., said the bulk of Southeast Asian exports had high import content and cautioned against imported inflation that could jack up costs of production.

Asia's currency crisis was triggered when Thailand effectively devalued its baht on July-2 after running out of reserves trying to defend the currency from speculative attacks.

The baht collapsed, sent other Southeast Asian currencies into a tailspin and caused financial havoc in the region.

Trade statistics show an export pick-up in the region but the impact of costlier imports on the economies is not yet clear, analysts said.

Thailand announced a current account surplus of 26.3 billion baht (\$478 million) for October, the first time the monthly figure was in positive territory since 1986.

The country's October fig-

ures showed a trade surplus of 23.3 billion baht, with 65.5 per cent growth in the value of exports to 192.7 billion baht, compared to an 11.2 per cent rise in the value of imports to 169.4 billion baht.

In dollar terms that translated into 12 per cent growth in exports and a 25 per cent plunge in imports compared with the same time in 1996.

Malaysia posted a higher-than-expected trade surplus of 672 million ringgit (\$150 million) in November, reversing a deficit of 504 million ringgit a year earlier.

An analyst from WorldSec Securities in Kuala Lumpur said the surplus reflected a significant slowdown in imports and the impact of currency depreciation on dollar-denominated exports.

Half of Malaysia's exports are electrical and electronics products, mainly integrated circuits, which are heavily reliant on machinery from

Japan. The impact of the ringgit's depreciation on these circuits is expected to be high in the electrical appliance sector, which uses a significant amount of imported Japanese parts.

Philippine exports, led by electronics, rose a strong 23.2 per cent from a year earlier to \$22.995 billion in the 11 months to November 1997, according to the National Statistics Office in Manila.

This growth was second only to China in the region and was proof that the real economy had escaped the worst, said Central Bank of the Philippines Governor Gabriel Singson.

Indonesian exports in the 10 months to October 1997 totalled \$43.996 billion, an increase of 8.16 per cent from a year earlier, with non-oil exports reaching \$34.325 billion, an increase of 9.73 per cent.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 14 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Someone is ordering you around. It just rubs you the wrong way, and you want to say something back. That is not a good idea. Let it run like water off a duck's back and you'll be more successful. Lay low. Play it cool. Watch what's going on. And don't start any fights.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You and your sweetheart could learn something together that will benefit you both. If you're considering a project that involves a partner, get started on it now. Make travel plans now too, even if you can't go today. All those things will go well, so relax.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Take an overtime assignment for extra money. If you're getting ready to decorate for the holidays, that few hours in exchange for a few more dollars will be a good trade. Meanwhile, lend an ear to a friend with a sad story. Don't lend anything else, however.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) You'll have a hassle this morning with an authority figure, but nothing you can't handle. By evening, everything will turn out splendidly. Try more new things than usual, especially in romance. Be bold. If you want a forever commitment, go ahead and make one.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) If you're finding another's sorrows annoying, maybe you're reminded of an unsettled issue in your own past. Learn a lesson from the other person's experience. This makes the whole situation more educational. Might as well look at it like that. Same price.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) You have more energy than usual, so a tough job looks simple. So what are you waiting for? You've had lots of good ideas over the past few weeks. Some of them could even be money-makers. Gather a group for a meeting around lunchtime and make it happen.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) You are a good negotiator. You can get both sides working together, because you understand so many points of view. Remember that, if someone is acting strange, consider his or her motivation, and what the payoff might be. That will help you understand the game plan.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) You have allies in a distant place who will help you achieve your goals. You know who these people are, and you know what they can do. Don't wait any longer. If you don't take advantage of the opportunity now, it may not come again for quite some time. Move on the idea right now.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) You could make an advancement in your career today. A new skill, plus old experience, will come in handy. You might find the job of your dreams through the grapevine. Knowing somebody who knows somebody could be an advantage. Don't be too proud to ask.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) You're learning a lot, and it shows. You're making a good impression. One person in particular really looks up to you. You like that. While you disagree on some subjects, you generally balance each other out. This is a relationship worth nurturing.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You'll have to work hard to keep up with a demanding person's requests. If you do your best, you'll make a good impression. They'll look at you as an expert. And you may get enough money to put some into your savings. This is a goal worth going for. Stop complaining.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) This is another beautiful day for you. You're lucky in love and travel. That should be a lot of fun. There is a problem about having to go to work, but that shouldn't be difficult to get around. If you come up with a good excuse, you might get the day off. It's certainly worth a try.

Birthstone of February: Amethyst — Onyx

THE Daily Crossword Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

ACROSS

- 1 Sennett and Gordon
- 8 Blackjack draw
- 10 Movie pooch
- 14 An Osmond
- 15 Reverberation
- 16 the Man
- 17 Speak with lengthened vowels
- 18 College grad
- 19 Jogging pace
- 20 SHOUT
- 22 Comfort
- 23 Printer fluid
- 24 Parched
- 25 Indian garb
- 27 Aroma
- 29 Took off, as a brooch
- 33 Religious group: abbr.
- 35 Austrian psychiatrist
- 36 Bauxite or Galena
- 37 Toward shelter
- 38 "Paint Your —"
- 39 Frank or Bronie
- 40 Nun: abbr.
- 41 Composer of "Ovar the Rainbow"
- 42 Trapped in the branches
- 43 McCoy's feud-mate
- 45 Lingerie pieces
- 46 Hoop
- 47 Behold
- 48 Anomalous
- 51 Mild expletive
- 53 SHOUT
- 57 All flutter
- 58 Wife of Zeus
- 59 Subarctic forest
- 60 Boyfriend
- 61 the Red
- 62 Happen
- 63 Theater backdrops
- 64 Office fixture
- 65 Colleagues

DOWN

- 1 Twice McCLUI
- 2 Hammerin' Hank
- 3 SHOUT
- 4 Another name for Chinese gooseberry
- 5 Individuality
- 6 Arctic explorer
- 7 Bruins of football
- 8 out (blanked)
- 9 Like some yarns
- 10 Aftward
- 11 SHOUT
- 12 Southwest art "mecca"
- 13 Poker stake
- 21 Go astray
- 26 Help
- 28 Unknown John
- 29 Exhorted
- 30 Las Vegas glitter
- 31 Sea eagle
- 32 Land title
- 33 Elan
- 34 Director Kazan
- 35 Drop
- 36 dramatically
- 38 Garlanded
- 39 Coach
- 40 Parseghian
- 41 Feel ill
- 42 Christmas star's place
- 44 Mold
- 45 Garden plot
- 47 Late-night bite
- 49 Foretell
- 50 Headliners
- 51 Taps gently
- 52 A Death in the Family author
- 54 and now
- 55 "Exodus" author
- 56 Zoom

Peanuts



Andy Capp



Mutt'n'Jeff



THE BETTER HALF By Glasbergen



JUMBLE

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

CEPI

MUPE

DERAIM

INSECK

Answer here: _____

Not too high, not too low. How much?

WHAT THE FORTUNE TELLER CHARGED FOR HER WORK

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Answer tomorrow

Yesterday's Jumbles: CHAIR LEAVE BECOME INNING
Answer: A dedicated housekeeper's work became this — HER MAINE CONCERN

Gullit demands to know real reason for sacking

LONDON (AFP) — Ruud Gullit Friday demanded to know the real reason behind his sacking as Chelsea manager in favour of Gianluca Vialli.

The Dutchman, who said he asked for £2 million a year as a basis for negotiation, was sensationally dismissed on Thursday after talks over his new contract broke down.

But a clearly-angry Gullit claimed there was more to his sacking than money and was desperate to find the real reason why he had been axed.

Gullit, speaking at a packed news conference in Kensington, said: "I want to know what the real reason is. Money is not the real reason. The money is only a stick they tried to hit me with."

"I think it will be very difficult to get that acknowledged by someone. It will always be a question mark for the rest of my life."

"If they had made me an offer I would have stayed because I wanted to stay. I never made a demand. It was a point of negotiation."

Gullit said that he had not expected to receive the £2 million a year he asked for to remain as Chelsea's player-manager and that he was



Ruud Gullit, former player/manager of Chelsea Football Club holds a news conference February 13 to explain his departure from the club (Reuters photo)

fully prepared to negotiate.

He said Chelsea had not made him any offer and he believes they went behind his back and had made up their minds to replace him.

Gullit also revealed that he was in negotiation with Rangers star Brian Laudrup and was waiting to hear confirmation that Laudrup was coming to London to

discuss terms.

But he was told that Laudrup's wife was ill and that the Danish winger would not be coming down to London, only to discover Friday that Laudrup had, in fact, been in the capital on Wednesday.

Gullit said: "On Thursday I heard that Brian Laudrup was in London on Wednesday and met with Gianluca Vialli and Gianfranco Zola and had a meeting with (managing director) Colin Hutchinson without me. That means they had everything planned behind my back."

Gullit said his rapid exit from Stamford Bridge had "staggered" him.

"I have never been in a position like this before. I have never been treated like this before," he said.

"I am in shock. Look at what I have done for Chelsea, for the players, for the fans. I thought everything was going well. We were second in the League, in the semi-finals of the Coca-Cola (League) Cup, in the quarter-finals of the (European) Cup Winners' Cup."

"Then this happens. It is fair to say this is a day you can't forget."

No blues for fiery Pitkowski at Paris Open

PARIS (AFP) — Sarah Pitkowski, a fiery 22-year-old red-head from Lille in northern France, outlasted eighth-seed Sabine Appelmans of Belgium to reach the quarter-finals at the \$480,000 Paris Indoor Open — and admitted she had never felt worse.

Pitkowski, currently ranked 60th, revealed that she has been taking anti-biotics for the past five days for a "dreadful" cold, and admitted that she found the sky-blue colours around the court inside the Coubertin Stadium "upsetting and tiring." "It's really bad for the eyes," said Pitkowski, who was beaten in the last round of the qualifying tournament by Larisa Neiland of Latvia but who got into the main tournament draw when former World No. 1 Steffi Graf withdrew with a calf injury.

"Still — I'm not complaining. I didn't expect to get this far," she grinned.

Pitkowski, who also beat her highly-rated teenage compatriot Anne-Gaelle Sidot in the first round, defeated the out-of-touch Appelmans 5-7, 6-3, 6-1 in 2hrs 13mins in the day's first match. And she was by no means intimidated by the big occasion.

After just five games she had already ticked off a linesman ("they put the lines on the court for a reason, you know") and told the umpire Giulia Orlandi with a stamp of the feet to "wake up." Although she dropped the first set she battled on — keeping an excellent length on her groundstrokes and picking up a lot of points by playing wide to the left-hander's backhand whenever she had the chance.

The defeat was a latest setback for the 24th-ranked Appelmans, who arrived in Paris without a tournament win after first-round defeats in both Sydney and the Australian Open. The Belgian champion hardly helped her effort by hitting a dozen double-faults.

The tournament lost its youngest competitor when Russian teenager Anna Kournikova crashed out to last year's finalist Anke Huber.

The fifth-seeded German, a semi-finalist at the Australian Open, looked down and out when her 16-year-old opponent took a 3-1 lead in the third-set. But Kournikova, who is now coached by Steffi Graf's former mentor Pavel Slozil, showed she still has a lot to learn by letting Huber off the hook.

Huber charged back to score a 6-2, 1-6, 6-4 win and she now plays French number-one Mary Pierce.

Pierce, the third seed, was her usual erratic self — racing away to take the first set 6-1 but then dropping the second by the same margin against Karina Habsudova of Slovakia.

The 23-year-old French player eventually clinched a 6-1, 1-6, 6-1 win.

Earlier top-seeded Jana Novotna sailed comfortably through her first match of 1998 by beating Rita Grande of Italy 6-1, 6-4 and declared herself fit and confident.

The 29-year-old Czech now plays seventh-seeded Barbara Paulus of Austria.

Paulus put out another Italian player, Silvia Farina 6-1, 6-3.

Second-seed Iva Majoli, returning for the first time to Paris since her historic win at last year's French Open, made a meal of her first tournament match and needed three sets to see off Florencia Labat of Argentina.

The 20-year-old Croatian had to steady her nerves when Labat climbed back to 4-4 after trailing 0-4 in the final set, before finally clinching a 5-7, 6-2, 6-4.

She now faces sixth-seed Dominique Van Roost of Belgium who recovered to defeat German qualifier Wiltrud Probst 5-7, 6-2, 7-6 (7/2).

African Nations Cup Sensational triumph for Togo over Ghana as Tunisia win

OUAGADOUGOU (AFP) — Togo caused one of the biggest upsets in African Nations Cup history by defeating Ghana 2-1 in a Group B match here on Thursday.

Frank Dote gave the West African minnows a 24th-minute lead which they grimly defended until eight minutes from the end when Sam Johnson levelled from a penalty kick.

But in the second minute of injury time substitute Mohamed Toure raced through to shoot past goalkeeper Simon Addo and leave the Abedi Pele-led Black Stars stunned.

Ghana, champions a record four times and one of the title favourites here, never reproduced the form that overwhelmed Tunisia in the opening round three days ago.

Goalkeeper Nihombe Wake, who plays for a Ghanaian club, was the Togolese hero, making a string of superb saves as Ghana attacked relentlessly in the second half at the August 4 Stadium.

The result coupled with a 2-1 victory for Tunisia over the Democratic Republic of Congo earlier in the day leaves the four countries level on three points entering the final mini-league matches.

Ghana face DR Congo and Tunisia meet Togo on Monday afternoon in an intriguing climax to a pool that Ghana and 1996 runners-up Tunisia were expected to dominate.

Tunisia back in contention

Ziad Tlemcani was the unlikely match-winner as Tunisia defeated the Democratic Republic of Congo 2-1 in an African Nations Cup Group B match here Thursday.

The veteran striker, dropped after the World Cup qualifiers lost 2-0 to Ghana on Monday night, came on as a substitute and snatched the 75th-minute winner in cloudy conditions at the Municipal Stadium.

Congolese defenders stood still expecting an offside whistle and Tlemcani raced through unopposed to slot the ball low past goalkeeper Nkombe Tokala and throw the pool wide open.

Fauzi Rouissi had a tame penalty kick saved by Tokala before Mehdi Ben Slimane gave Tunisia a 31st-minute lead when he hooked a Tarek Thabet pass into the far corner.

Fullback Okintankoyi Kimoto levelled five minutes later as a pass from captain Ekanza Simba was deflected into his path and he drilled the ball past Ali Boumrijel. It was an unconvincing performance by Tunisia, whose star midfielder Zoubair Beya once again disappointed and was replaced by Kais Godhbane nine minutes into the second half.

Angola force draw in thriller

BOBO-DIOULASSO, Burkina Faso (AFP) — Angola wiped out a two-goal deficit to draw 3-3 with Namibia in a thrilling African Nations Cup Group C match here Thursday.

Namibia, appearing at the finals for the first time and coached by a schoolteacher, looked set for victory when Gervanusi Uri-Khob slammed a free kick into the net after 49 minutes.

The goal gave the Namibians a 3-1 advantage and it took a harsh penalty award midway through the second half to bring their Southern Africa neighbours back into contention.

Television replays showed Mohamed Aoubé fairly tackling Miguel Pereira, but Senegalese referee Falla Ndoye pointed to the spot and Paulo Silva easily beat Ronnie Kamelelo.

Angola gained a slight territorial advantage as Namibia tired in the 30 degrees heat and it was no surprise when Pereira from German club Schalke 04 equalised with seven minutes left.

Morocco's Al Hadji: We don't fear Brazil

BOBO-DIOULASSO, Burkina Faso (AFP) — Morocco's star midfielder Mustapha Al Hadji said Friday that his country will fear no one at the World Cup despite being in the same group as world champions Brazil.

Al Hadji, who has recently moved from Portugal's Sporting Lisbon to Spanish club Deportivo La Coruna, took time out from his African Nations Cup preparations here to give his views on the World Cup.

The 26-year-old, brought up in France and who made his professional debut at Nancy at 18, said: "To play Brazil will be a real big event for us because every successful team would have to meet Brazil, whether it is in the first round or the final."

"We mustn't forget moments like that but we must not mess them up either. They are the world champions and we need to make it hard for them."

But by the same token, Al Hadji did not think Morocco, with whom he reached the second round of USA '94, would be overwhelmed by such a famous footballing nation.

"We fear no one, not even Brazil. It's true it's a difficult group but I don't think we have any worries. And the fact we are playing in France is practically at home because there are so many Moroccans in France and we have an advantage."

Al-Hadji was happy to play in this African Nations Cup just four months before the World Cup because it

allowed him to improve his physical condition.

He has not played much since signing a contract with Deportivo La Coruna a month ago to join up with two fellow Moroccans, defender Nouredine Naybet and striker Salaheddine Bassir.

Although Al-Hadji was happy with his season overall, more in the European Champions League than in the Portuguese League, he said he needed to improve his physical condition.

"It's true this competition has given me a little extra on the physical side because I needed to work hard and this African Nations Cup has come at a good time for me," Al Hadji added.

Morocco have tended to do better in World Cup qual-

ifiers than in the African Nations Cup in the last few years, although they did win the continental competition back in both 1976 and 1980. "We have more problems in African football because it is a very physical game. Ours is more technical and a slower game and perhaps that's why it's sometimes difficult against the African sides," he said. "Morocco have their eyes on the bigger prospect of success in the World Cup but they will not want to be humiliated here. To play here with one eye looking at France would not be a good thing."

"What we really need to do is go to the World Cup as African champions — that would really give us a psychological edge."

Barnsley out to avenge 7 goal humiliation

LONDON (AFP) — Premiership strugglers Barnsley hope that they become the latest side to benefit from Manchester United's current slump in form when they take them on in the fifth round of the FA Cup on Sunday — particularly as the last time they visited Old Trafford they were thrashed 7-0.

Barnsley, who beat Spurs 3-1 in a fourth round replay, have improved considerably since that October massacre and United, who have only won one of their last four Premiership matches will have to be on their guard.

Barnsley will rely on their midfield maestro Neil Redfearn, who is also their top scorer, and striker Ashley Ward, who has made an effective return since a bout of meningitis, for their punching power up front and just hope that Adrian de Zeeuw and Adie Moses hold things together at the back.

Arsenal, who are on a high after reviving their title challenge since Tony Adams' return, host London rivals and Premiership strugglers Crystal Palace.

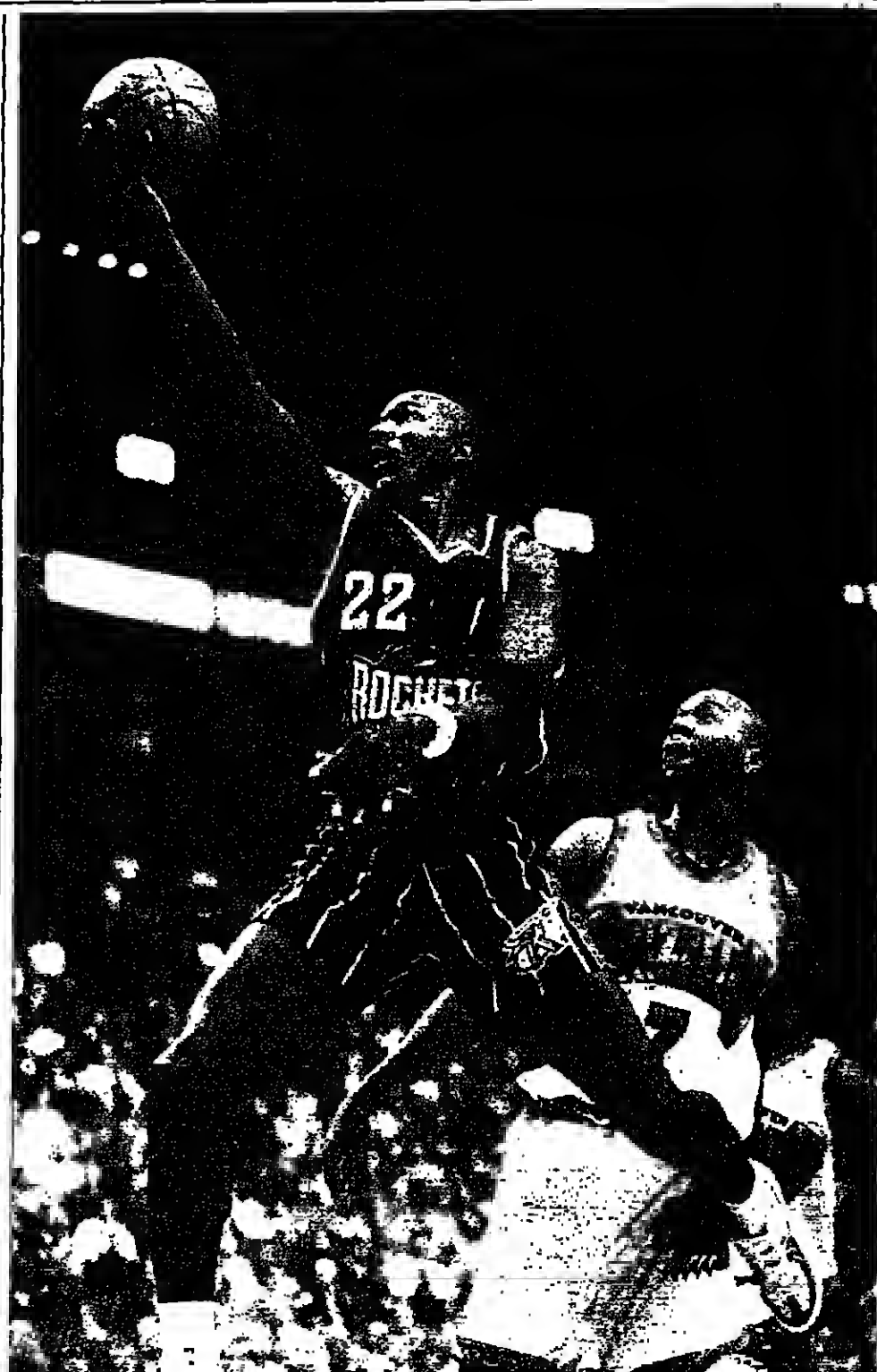
West Ham, who won the Cup back in 1976, play host to Blackburn Rovers which should prove to be the most attractive tie of the round.

Asen Villa need a victory to restart their season as they are in serious danger of slipping into a relegation battle and a home win over Coventry in the Cup would at least give the fans and embattled manager Brian Little some relief.

Leeds, whose manager George Graham launched another of his favourite attacks on foreign 'prima donnas' this week, could have problems with Birmingham City, for whom ex-Chelsea striker Paul Furlong has rediscovered his scoring touch.

There are also three Premiership matches with Liverpool having really to win away at Sheffield Wednesday to keep their title hopes alive — a win would put them just two points adrift of Manchester United, though they will have played a game more.

Both Spurs and Everton have the chance to grab some vital points as they host Leicester and Derby.



Houston Rockets' Clyde Drexler goes in for a lay up basket while Vancouver Grizzlies' Sam Mack is powerless to defend during first quarter action of their NBA game. Houston won 112-103 (Reuters photo)

SCOREBOARD

NBA			
Cleveland	103	Toronto	94
Portland	115	Phoenix	110
Utah	118	Boston	100
Houston	112	Vancouver	103
Sacramento	87	Denver	84

Spanish Cup (return-leg quarter-final)
Betis 2 Zaragoza 2
(Zaragoza qualify 5-2 on aggregate)

African Nations Cup

Group B			
Togo	2	Ghana	1
Tunisia	2	D. R. of Congo	1

Group C

Angola	3	Namibia	3
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French First Division

Rennes	1	Auxerre	1
Chateauroux	2	Lens	1

CINEMA	TEL: 634144	CINEMA	TEL: 634144	CINEMA	TEL: 6699238	CINEMA	TEL: 5677420	CINEMA	TEL: 079 33430	CINEMA	TEL: 079 33430	Hisham Yanes Theatre	TEL: 625155
PHILADELPHIA "1"		PHILADELPHIA "2"		PLAZA		CONCORD		GALLERIA 2		GALLERIA 1			
Pierce Brosnan as James Bond				Harrison Ford in		CONCORD "1"		ABDOUN		ABDOUN		NOW ON DAILY	
007...TOMORROW NEVER DIES		THE PEACEMAKER		AIR FORCE ONE		Adel Imam & Yusra ... in		I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER		BRAD PITT...in		THE GOVERNMENT	
Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30		Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30		Shows: 10:30, 8:30, 3:30, 12:30		(ARABIC)		Shows: 3:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30		SEVEN YEARS IN TIBET		IN THE SERVICE OF PEOPLE	
						CONCORD "2"		MORNING SHOWS		Shows: 3:30, 6:00, 8:15, 10:45		Starring Hisham Yanes and Amal Dabbas	
						MR. BEAN		101 DALMATIANS					For reservations call: 640155, 625155
						Shows: 3:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30							

Relieved Rebagliati will change lifestyle, not friends

NAGANO (AFP) — A relieved Ross Rebagliati said Friday he was ready to change his lifestyle after nearly losing his snowboarding gold medal for doping.

The 26-year-old Canadian was cleared Thursday of wrongdoing on appeal after testing positive for marijuana following Sunday's race.

Sitting proudly with the medal around his neck, Rebagliati told reporters of his relief at being able to keep the gold — as well as his shock at the initial news he was to lose his title.

"Winning the medal was the best moment of my life — losing it was the worst moment of my life," Rebagliati said.

"It all happened in a short amount of time. It was an amazing feeling — quite a ride."

Asked how he felt on hearing he had tested positive, Rebagliati said: "I felt light-headed, I felt cold. I started to sweat. I had to sit down." "But the worse the sky came down on me the more my friends pulled together. My dad had nothing but support for me."

The Canadian freely admitted he had in the past occasionally smoked marijuana but stressed: "It wasn't something that ruled any part of my life. It was a social activity."

And he insisted that while he had learned a lesson he would not condemn drug-taking outright as it was not for him to judge his friends.

"Life is a learning process — if you make bad decisions you have to deal with that."

"I'm going to change my lifestyle. I'm not going to change my friends. But I might have to wear a gas-mask from now on," the young Canadian joked.

Rebagliati says he last took marijuana in April 1997, but gave up as part of his quest for Olympic gold. He had already admitted that virtually everyone around him on the snowboarding scene has smoked the drug.

NBA'S Raptors sold to NHL's Maple Leafs

TORONTO (AP) — The owner of the Toronto Raptors said Thursday he sold his majority ownership in the national basketball association club to the Toronto Maple Leafs of the National Hockey League.

Allan Slaight told CFRB, the radio station he also owns and that carries raptors games, that he sold the team "with regret."

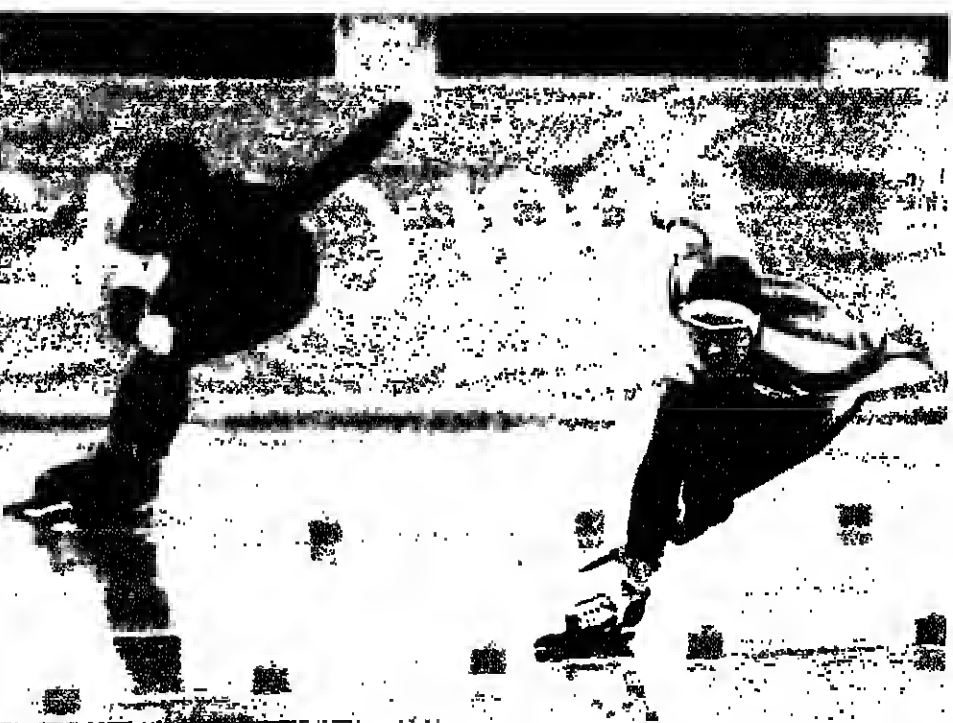
The Leafs and Raptors called a news conference for later to formally announce the sale.

The deal ends lengthy haggling between the Leafs and Raptors over whether they should build one arena together or each build a separate facility.

As part of the deal, the Leafs will get control of the air canada center, which is under construction near Toronto's waterfront. It is due to open in 1999.



Lasse Kjus of Norway goes over a jump on his way to taking the silver medal in the men's Olympic Downhill race February 13. Jean-Luc Cretier of France won the gold. Kjus won silver in both men's Alpine downhill and combined events at the Winter Olympics (Reuters photo)



South Korea's Kang Mi-Young (R) races against North Korea's Chun Hee-Joo in the Olympic women's 500 metres first race February 13. Kang won the race against Chun with Kang finishing in 30th position and Chun in 35th position after the first of the events two races (Reuters photo)

Nagano Games Cretier seizes gold as Maier demolishes safety nets

NAGANO (AFP) — French customs officer Jean-Luc Cretier seized his chance after super-favourite Hermann Maier and 15 other downhill racers went flying to win the Olympic blue ribbon event at the Nagano Games on Friday.

The 31-year-old, who has never won a major downhill in his life, defied the mighty Austrian team to give France their first downhill title for 30 years, when Jean-Claude Killy pulled off his treble at Grenoble in 1968.

Maier's words came back to haunt him as he survived a horrific crash as he set after Cretier's time. After the first practice run he had written off the course as too easy.

The 25-year-old slipped into the air after just 18 seconds when he misjudged his entry into a gate which had been repositioned earlier in the morning when the start was delayed because of gusting winds.

He was extremely doubtful for Saturday's Super-G for which he is the World Cup leader. Team-mates Stefan Eberharter, Andreas Schifferer and Hans Knauss, who are second, third and fourth in the World Cup standings, are favourites for Saturday's race.

Norway's Lasse Kjus became the first man to win two Alpine silver medals on the same day when three hours after finishing second to Cretier he lost his Combined title to Austria's Mario Reiter.

The Austrians, so imposing in practice, were left with only a bronze medal in the downhill. Hannes Trinkl saving the day for them.

Andreas Schifferer, the current World Cup downhill leader, had to wait for 11 minutes as course marshalls rebuilt the fencing.

The 23-year-old Schifferer, who survived a near fatal crash in Kitzbuehel two years ago, appeared to be shaken and was never in contention.

Defending champion Tommy Moe of America finished 12th.

Reiter made a spectacular Olympic debut when he won the men's combined.

The 27-year-old, who led



Jean-Luc Cretier of France is held aloft by former French champions Luc Alphand (L) and Franck Piccard (R) after winning the gold medal in the men's Olympic downhill race February 13. Cretier has never won a race or a medal in 11 years in the sport, but has finished repeatedly on the podium this season (Reuters photo)

after Monday's slalom, held off the challenge of Kjus and teammate Christian Mayer.

Stefan Krauss and Jan Behrendt completed a Germany clean-sweep of the luge events when they won the doubles ahead of two American pairs.

Georg Hackl had complet-

ed his hat-trick in the men's and Silke Kraushaar had won the women's event.

There was a surprising Olympic start to the Dream Team hockey tournament as the United States NHL squad crashed 4-2 to defending champions Sweden for whom Daniel Alfredson scored twice.

But another Swedish side, their world champion curling rink, face two tricky play-offs, against the United States and Japan after losing to Switzerland, to reach the medal round.

World record holder Catriona LeMay Doan of Canada was poised to win her first speed skating gold medal in Saturday's second heat after breaking American Bonnie Blair's ten-year-old Olympic record.

Germany's Katrina Seizinger, fastest in practice, renews her battle with Super-G winner Picabo Street of the United States in Saturday's other big event, the women's downhill.

Nagano Games schedule for Feb. 14 (all times GMT)

* Curling (Karuzawa): Men's and women's playoffs 0900/0000. Women's semi-finals 1400/0500. Men's semi-finals 1800/0900

* Alpine skiing (Happo'one Hakuba): Women's downhill 1015/0115

* Nordic skiing (Kamishiro Hakuba): Men's 15km pursuit 0900/0000

* Ice hockey-women (Aqua Wing Nagano): Japan v Sweden 1200/0300, Finland v China 1600/0700. Canada v USA 2000/1100

* Nordic combined (Kamishiro Hakuba): Individual 15km 1300/0400

* Bobsleigh (Iizuna Kogen): Two-man bob 1500/0600

* Ice hockey-men (Big Hat Nagano): Final phase, A1 v USA (C) 1445/0545, Sweden v Canada (C) 1845/0945

* Speed skating (M-Wave Nagano): Women's 500m 1630/0730

* Figure skating (White Ring Nagano): Men's free programme 1900/0010

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, Ranjit Singh — S/o Sri. Dev Raj — holding PP No. P050518, issued in Jalandhar (India) hereby declare that Ranjit Singh and Ranjeet Kaushal are same and from now I shall be named as Ranjeet Kaushal in all official proceedings and I shall sign the same.
Ranjeet Kaushal,
P.O. Box 611, Al-Matraq 25110 — Jordan

Win the OMEGA Seamaster Actually Worn by James Bond in Tomorrow Never Dies!
IN CONNECTION with Tomorrow Never Dies, the 18th episode in the exciting film series of agent 007's extraordinary spy adventures, OMEGA — official supplier of James Bond's watch — offers a fantastic contest on its Internet site, on line until February 13, 1998 at: <http://www.omega.ch>

First prize: James Bond's own Seamaster Professional! The 10 runners-up will receive a special Bond OMEGA Seamaster model. The next 100 finalists will win a CD of the original music soundtrack of Tomorrow Never Dies. To enter, fill in the contest entry form and answer the 15 questions about the intrepid secret agent 007, James Bond! As of December 15th, there have been more than 2000 contest entries!

Nagano medals table

	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
Germany	5	4	4	13
Russia	4	3	0	7
Norway	3	5	3	11
United States	2	1	3	6
Finland	2	1	2	5
Japan	2	1	0	3
France	2	0	0	2
Austria	1	2	6	9
Netherlands	1	2	1	4
Canada	1	1	1	3
Switzerland	1	0	1	2
Bulgaria	1	0	0	1
Italy	0	3	1	4
C. Republic	0	1	1	2
Ukraine	0	1	0	1
Belarus	0	0	1	1
Belgium	0	0	1	1
Total	25	25	25	75

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LEVI'S BRAND USA NAMES TBWA CHIAI / DAY NATIONAL ADVERTISING AGENCY

SAN FRANCISCO (January 26, 1998) — The Levi's® Brand USA has named TBWA Chai/Day as its national advertising agency after a review initiated last October. TBWA Chai/Day will immediately assume its role as the Levi's® brand's marketing partner.

"Some of the world's top agencies participated in this review, and we were extremely impressed with the strategic and creative thinking they presented," said Gordon D. Shank, president, Levi Strauss, the Americas. "In the end, TBWA Chai/Day demonstrated a deep understanding of the Levi's® brand and the strongest recommendations for taking it forward."

Levi Strauss & Co. is the world's largest branded apparel manufacturer with record sales of \$7.1 billion in 1996. The company markets Levi's® jeans, Dockers® khakis and Slates® dress pants.

TBWA Chai/Day are represented in the Middle East by the "Intermarkets Advertising" network with offices in Beirut, Damascus, Amman, Cairo, Riyadh, Jeddah, Kuwait, Bahrain and Dubai.

PNA plans series of events marking '48 'catastrophe'

RAMALLAH (AP) — Say the word "Al Nakba" — Arabic for "the catastrophe" — and Palestinians think of only one event: Israel's creation in 1948 that led to the uprooting of hundreds of thousands of their people.

With Israel's 50th anniversary celebrations now officially launched, some 200 Palestinians came together Thursday to find ways to tell their side of the story.

Ideas raised by the legislators and intellectuals included establishing a national museum and collecting the stories of those who during the 1948 Mideast war fled or were expelled from their own land — estimates of their numbers ranging from a half million to 800,000.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, who addressed the gathering, said the Palestinians should celebrate the occasion in spite of all the pain they hold in their minds and hearts.

"We should not mark this occasion with tears, but with a renewed vow to continue the struggle for peace and independence," Mr. Arafat said.

The yearlong events — held under the slogan "Reviving the Memory of the Catastrophe" — will climax on May 15, the day in 1948 when Arab armies invaded the a day-old state. A "national march" will take place in every Palestinian city on May 15, 1998.

"I hope it will be a million-person march," said Culture Minister Yasser Abed Rabbo.

Hanan Ashrawi, the Palestinian Minister of Higher Education, recommended the creation of a national museum that will document Palestinian history through photos and audio accounts of refugees and others to be collected by Palestinian university students.

Other suggestions included staging mock trials of Israeli generals for war crimes, and gathering ownership documents of property in Israel that was Palestinian.

Israel launched its own 50th anniversary celebrations on Wednesday with a ceremony in the provincial town of Kiryat Gat, where Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other officials helped plant 50 trees.

U.S. reported hesitant on approval of oil-for-food increase for Iraq

UNITED NATIONS (R) — U.N. Security Council members negotiating an increase in a "oil-for-food" programme for Iraq believe they can reach broad agreement on Friday but Washington may still hesitate before giving final approval.

Britain, Portugal and Spain introduced another version of a draft resolution on Thursday after days of negotiations among council members.

At issue are proposals from U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan to increase from \$2 billion to \$5.256 billion the amount of oil Iraq would be allowed to sell over six months in order to buy food, medicine and other supplies.

The aim is to provide greater benefits for ordinary Iraqis, many suffering from malnutrition, because of stringent U.N. sanctions imposed since Baghdad's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Specifically the United States objects to a provision asking Mr. Annan to recommend what Iraq needs to repair

its oil facilities. Baghdad officials have said their equipment was in disrepair and doubt they can pump as much as \$5.2 billion worth of oil at current prices.

U.S. officials, diplomats said, wanted stronger language to make clear that the council's Sanctions Committee has the last word in agreeing to imports of equipment. The text now "encourages" the panel to approve whatever Mr. Annan recommends.

British Ambassador Sir John Weston wants a vote taken by Tuesday in what has turned into an unusual proceeding.

The council is increasing humanitarian supplies while two of its members, the United States and Britain, contemplate an attack against Iraq for not allowing U.N. arms inspectors unconditional access.

Some diplomats believe that even if U.S. experts in New York agree on the text, Washington may still delay approval if it appears there would be political fall out to

such a move.

Paradoxically, Iraq dislikes the programme, viewing it as an insult to its dignity because of heavy U.N. monitoring as well as arguing it is a substitute for lifting sanctions. This position has prompted the U.S. to say that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein cares more about his palaces than his people.

In response to a letter from Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Said Al Sahaf detailing Baghdad's objections, Mr. Annan has proposed talks in New York with Iraqi officials.

His spokesman said these were "to review all relevant issues and reach agreements as required" to enable the government to submit as soon as possible a distribution plan for the humanitarian supplies.

Even after adoption of the resolution, it would not go into effect until the day after Mr. Annan notifies the Security Council that he has approved an Iraqi distribution plan.

Iraqis mourn victims of 1991 U.S. air raid

BAGHDAD (R) — Salah Abdul Hamid stood silently on Friday before photographs of his mother and six other family members who died seven years ago when U.S. laser-guided bombs turned the Amriya shelter into an inferno.

"We expect anything of the United States," he said, as black-clad women sat on the floor, tending candles for the dead at the shelter where more than 400 people were burned alive.

"They love war and killing, we love peace," he said simply, when asked about renewed threats by the United States and Britain to turn their high-tech arsenal against Iraq to force it to give unlimited access to U.N. weapons inspectors.

U.S. pilots attacked the air

raid shelter, in a residential western suburb of Baghdad, in the mistaken belief that it was a military command centre, not a refuge for civilians.

Seven years after the event, visitors still gaze in horror at the devastated interior, decorated with wreaths of plastic flowers, incense sticks, candles and photographs of the dead.

The first bomb gouged a hole about two metres across in the thick concrete roof of the one-storey structure, leaving a tangle of steel reinforcing rods splayed out beneath.

The second fell through the hole and exploded, incinerating those inside, including 261 women and 52 children, according to Iraqi official figures. It dug a deep crater in the concrete floor, but failed to penetrate to the basement

below.

Um Ghaida, who now works at the charred building, preserved as a war memorial, said she had lost nine relatives there. "I am determined to live here until my death, to be buried in this shelter because they killed me while I was alive," she said.

Iman Ali Hussein, four of whose relatives died in the raid, said he had harboured hatred for former U.S. President George Bush, but not for the American people and called for peace.

"I can't imagine any Iraqi will enter a shelter again," he said. "It's better for them to die in their homes."

Mr. Bush assembled the Gulf war coalition whose forces drove Iraqi occupation troops from Kuwait in 1991.



WORLD PRESS PHOTO OF 1997: A Sept. 23, 1997 picture of an Algerian woman grieving after a massacre in Benthala, taken by the Agence France Presse photographer Hocine won the World Press Photo of the Year 1997 Award in Amsterdam Friday (AP photo)

Canadian MPs to visit Algeria, study violence

OTTAWA (R) — Canada will send a parliamentary delegation to Algeria next month to discuss the bloodshed there and the plight of ordinary citizens. Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy said on Thursday.

The visit will follow trips this week by members of the European Parliament and in January by a Canadian envoy Claude Laverdure and three junior European Union ministers.

"This visit will take place within the framework of the political dialogue between Canadian and Algerian authorities, which has intensified recently following the tragic events in Algeria over the past months," Mr. Axworthy said in a statement.

The delegation will be led by Don Boudria, a cabinet member who is the liberal government's house leader, managing its affairs in the house of commons. He visited Algeria in December 1996.

The statement said the delegation "will discuss the security situation in the country and the plight of the people with their Algerian counterparts and with civil society."

Mr. Boudria said he would "express all Canadians' sympathy and solidarity with the Algerian population during this difficult period."

An estimated 65,000 people have died in six years of violence since the Algerian authorities cancelled an election in which Islamists held a commanding lead.

Turkey orders arrest of pro-Kurdish party leaders

ISTANBUL (R) — Prosecutors have ordered the arrest of the entire leadership of Turkey's only legal pro-Kurdish party, government officials said on Friday.

"We will take them all in for engaging in activities against the law," Tahir Salk, prosecutor at the State Security Court told Reuters.

He declined to specify the nature of the charges against the 57 HADEP board members.

On Thursday, Ankara police detained nine members of the People's Democracy Party (HADEP) as part of an inquiry into 1998 party - calendars alleged to promote separatism.

"The calendar is one element of crime among others," Mr. Salk said.

Yusef Alatas, lawyer for HADEP, dismissed the charges as a ploy to tar HADEP's image and link it improperly to the outlawed Kurdistan Labour Party (PKK), which is fighting for autonomy in the mainly Kurdish southeast.

"The real aim is to create an image of HADEP and its leaders as a criminal group in society's eye," Mr. Alatas said.

Party activists say they believe the 1998 calendars have been targeted for featuring pictures of Leyla Zana, a Kurdish former MP now serving a 15-year sentence for ties

to the PKK. Mr. Zana received the Andrei Sakharov Peace Prize in 1995.

The calendars also contain a list of people affiliated with HADEP and related organisations who have died in so-called "Mystery Murders" over the years, party members said.

Attorney Alatas said he planned to file an appeal against the detention order later on Friday.

HADEP made a strong showing throughout the mainly Kurdish areas in 1995 polls but failed to surpass the ten per cent national barrier required to send MPs to parliament.

Albright said expected to find Total in violation

WASHINGTON (R) — U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is near to a formal conclusion that a natural gas deal with Iran by France's Total Sa and two other foreign firms violates U.S. laws, U.S. sources said on Thursday.

There has been no firm decision about what comes next, but the expectation is that Ms. Albright will opt for consultations that delay temporarily a final resolution of the controversy rather than impose sanctions or waive sanctions, they said.

"They've made a decision in principle to issue a finding of sanctionability," one source told Reuters.

Other sources — in the Clinton administration.

Congress and outside of government — said it was inconceivable that Ms. Albright would not find Total in violation given the U.S. law and the strong feeling in Washington about the perceived threat from Iran's nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programmes.

State Department spokesman James Rubin, asked about these reports, told Reuters that Ms. Albright "has made no decision and the idea that a decision in principle has been made would be premature in the extreme."

He said Ms. Albright told him she had not yet received a formal recommendation on potential action from Undersecretary of State Stuart Eizenstat, who is managing the issue for her.

Several sources said they expected an announcement this week that Ms. Albright had found the controversial deal to be in violation of the 1996 Iran-Libya Sanctions Act or ILSA.

But the announcement was delayed because the administration did not want to roll new turmoil with Europe and Russia as it sought support for its tough line toward Iraq, sources said.

Separately, in an interview with Reuters, Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky was asked if there would be a decision this week on the issue, which could have sparked a trans-Atlantic trade war and other frictions.



Love festival let down for millions

LONDON (AFP) — St. Valentine's Day in Britain this year has also been designated National Impotence day in a bid to increase public awareness of the problem. An estimated three million British men suffer with erectile dysfunction and for them Valentine's Day on Feb. 14 is not a romance-filled occasion.

Britain's Impotence Association has set up a telephone hot line and increased its number of advisers to deal with an expected influx of calls.

Teenage Romeo bitten by lion

NICOSIA (R) — A teenage soldier who fondled lions during an illicit late night visit to a Cyprus zoo with his girlfriend was being treated for bite wounds in hospital. The 18-year-old said he stuck his hands through cage railings to stroke two lions when they bit him, police said. The soldier went to a zoo in the coastal town of Limassol at 2.45 a.m., with his girlfriend. Police said they were investigating how they got into the compound, which was locked at the time. "We are trying to figure out what they were doing there at that time in the morning. He was lucky they didn't bite anything else," a police source said.

Radioactive pigeon scare hits England

LONDON (R) — An unusual health scare has struck at one of Britain's major nuclear power plants — the bizarre case of radioactive pigeons. Several investigations are underway after local pigeons were found to be radioactive near the Sellafield nuclear facility in northwest England, industry officials said. The scare comes days after a satirical television programme did a sketch about the dangers of radioactive seagulls in the area. Plant operators BNFL said the levels of radiation in local seagulls were not dangerous.

Nepalese villager claims to be world's oldest man

LONDON (AFP) — A Nepalese villager claims he is the world's oldest man at 141 years, but hasn't got the birth certificate to prove it, according to press reports. Bir Narayan Chaudhari says he was born in November 1856, before even the American civil war and when Queen Victoria was a young monarch. Royal correspondents of several British tabloid newspapers, who had been in Nepal covering Prince Charles' visit there, made the dusty 12-hour journey from Kathmandu to the remote village of Birnagar, to interview the wizened villager. The secret of the former farmer's longevity, he says, is "raw tobacco and no alcohol."

Male brain shrinks faster than the female — study

DETROIT (R) — Adding fuel to the battle between the sexes, U.S. researchers said they have discovered evidence that the male human brain shrinks faster with age than the female brain. The study by researchers at Henry Ford Hospital, using magnetic resonance images, showed that between the ages of 65 and 95, men experience an average of 30 per cent increase in cerebrospinal fluid around the outside of the brain, an indication of brain shrinkage while women experience a one per cent increase. "My wife says it's no surprise to her," said Dr. C. Edward Coffey, who took part in the study.

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Cypriot Socialist Party decides against backing either candidate

NICOSIA (AP) — The small but influential Socialist Party has decided to remain neutral in Cyprus' presidential election, leaving Sunday's runoff vote wide open for the two candidates.

Former Foreign Minister George Iacovou, 59, finished first with 40.6 per cent of the vote in last Sunday's election. President Glafcos Clerides, 78, won 40.6 per cent. But since neither candidate won the necessary majority, a runoff vote must be held.

The Socialist Party, which came in third with 10.6 per cent of the vote, emerged as a possible power broker. But the party's central committee decided at a late night meeting that ended early Friday not to back either candidate and allow its members "to vote at will."

The winner of the runoff is expected to begin crucial negotiations to reunify the east Mediterranean island. Cyprus has been unofficially partitioned since

Turkey invaded and occupied its northern third in 1974 after an abortive coup by Greek Cypriot supporters of union with Greece. A breakaway Turkish Cypriot state in the north is only recognised by Turkey.

Vassos Lyssarides, the 78-year-old Socialist leader, had received commitments this week from both candidates to form an all-party national unity coalition government if elected.

"Tonight's decision is a follow up to our proposal for national unity. Choosing to back either candidate would have affected this unity, particularly as both accepted our proposal for an all-party coalition," Mr. Lyssarides said.

The leaders of four other small parties, which together received 7.5 per cent last Sunday, have backed Mr. Clerides. But it wasn't certain that they could rally enough support for the incumbent to swing the vote.